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The Graduate School

DAN FORREST'S *THE BREATH OF LIFE*: A PODIUM GUIDE
WITH A STUDY OF THE COMPOSITIONAL
TECHNIQUES AND THE INTEGRATION
OF TEXTS USED TO MIRROR THE
EMOTIONAL ARC OF THE
HUMAN LIFE CYCLE

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Arts

Brian Keith Dukeshier

College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Music
Choral and Orchestral Conducting

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This dissertation by Brian Keith Dukeshier

Entitled *Dan Forrest's The Breath of Life: A Podium Guide with a Study of the Compositional Techniques and the Integration of Texts Used to Mirror the Emotional Arc of the Human Life Cycle*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Arts in the College of Performing and Visual Arts, School of Music, Choral and Orchestral Conducting Program

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ABSTRACT

Dukeshier, Brian Keith. *Dan Forrest's the breath of life: A Podium Guide with a Study of the Compositional Techniques and the Integration of Texts Used to Mirror the Emotional Arc of the Human Life Cycle*. Published Doctor of Arts dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2023.

Dan Forrest's *the breath of life* is a contemporary composition the author believes will be performed numerous times in future years after the extensive physical and emotional effect the pandemic had on the world. Although composed prior to the pandemic, *the breath of life* could bring comfort and a salve to the hurt and pain of humankind caused by the pandemic but will also affect the emotional state of loss for years to come for all humanity. This work exhibits Forrest's use of acousmatic electronics with choir and orchestra. Biblical texts as well as poetry written by three poets from a variety of historical time periods and countries are employed. Compositionally, his integration of human breath as an extended compositional technique rather than simply as a biological human function creates an artistic soundscape, uniquely supporting the "breath of life" aspect of this work.

This document contains a choral conductor's evaluation and study of Forrest's compositional style as illustrated through analyses of *the breath of life*. Chapter I consists of biographical information about the composer, Dan Forrest, and an introduction to this piece, *the breath of life*. Chapter II contains backgrounds and analyses of the texts used in *the breath of life*. Chapter III—a discussion of musical form and composition construction—contains an analysis of the formal elements in each movement of *the breath of life*. It also examines

Forrest's views on melodic and harmonic elements as well as how he negotiates the complicated relationship between music and text. Chapter IV focuses on the different types of compositional techniques Forrest uses throughout this work. The final chapter contains performance considerations based on the analysis of *the breath of life*, a discussion of issues related to the conductor's role in the preparation of the works, and other general conclusions.

Through analysis, discussions, articles and interviews, this dissertation provides an overview and a detailed in-depth study of this work to aid future conductors in their preparations for performing this work.

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Laura, my dearest wife, thank you for being a steady and secure companion in my life, not only during the writing of this document, but throughout our twenty-five years of marriage. Not only have you served as my number one cheerleader, but you have sacrificed a great deal as I have spent many late nights and many weekends researching and writing. You have borne a heavy burden during my absence, and I will always love you for it.

Most of all, I must thank God for the musical talents He has given me and His sustaining grace to struggle through this document. There were many times during the past seven years that

the temptation to quit was overwhelming, but He renewed my strength day by day. I sincerely believe that it was through His strength and power that this document was completed. Soli Deo Gloria!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the initial analysis began to unfold for *the breath of life*, it was realized by the author that the commissioning, the composing, and the premiere performance all occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that encased the world in March 2020. As the study for this document continued, the impact the author fathomed this piece could have on the choral community grew to include all areas of the arts that suffered during the shut-down even including all expanse of human pain and loss. Now that this document has come to completion, the realization by the author is that the longevity of this work will have a much greater impact than first imagined. Forrest speaks of a voice that not only speaks retrospectively of painful events of the past, but maybe even greater, prophetically in helping humanity cope with and move through the painful loss that will come in the future.

The author believes that this work's immediate impact was because of the respect and love that musicians have for Forrest's music. His impact on the choral world is widely recognized. The author also believes *the breath of life* will continue to have an impact to many because of its relation to present and future challenges faced by humanity. It will continue to soothe the pain of loss to all who hear it both now and for years into the future.

The beginning of life is birth and the end of life is death. This cycle of life is universal and will always remain a part of all life. The pain that is associated with death will forever affect the emotions of not just humanity, but all of nature where death is present. May this piece affect the pain of loss for many generations to come.

Dan Forrest has quickly become a world-renowned American composer whose choral music has become a staple in many music libraries from the small volunteer church choir to the professional symphonic choir and all performing groups in between. Dr. Forrest has been described as "having an undoubted gift for writing beautiful music...that is truly magical with works hailed as magnificent, very cleverly constructed sound sculpture."¹ His talents, whether choral, orchestral, or instrumental, can tug at the heart strings of musicians and non-musicians alike. Audiences around the world are treated to an emotional connection to his music whether performed in the local school auditorium or in one of the finest musical halls around the world. His compositions have taken the choral world by storm because of his innate ability to create pieces that are accessible by choirs of differing ability levels. A review in *The Salt Lake Tribune* referred to Forrest's "superb choral writing" and gave as an example his arrangement of "The First Noel," which it said was "full of spine-tingling moments."²

Forrest is known for his skill in writing melodic lines for all voices and instruments. While addressing modern composers in an interview done with J.W. Pepper, Forrest mentions that a composer's ability to listen analytically while thinking and understanding and not just hearing gives greater success when combined with the book-learning of counterpoint, orchestration and part-writing.³ He attributes his own assimilation of this approach to his study with two great composers, Alice Parker and James Barnes⁴. He touts Parker as being a "foremost influence" in his composing.⁵ In an interview with Mike Horanski, the Artistic Director of the

¹ Dan Forrest, "About Dan Forrest." <https://danforrest.com/bio/>.

² Robert Coleman, "Review: Salt Lake Choral Artists' Voices Blend Perfectly," *Salt Lake City Tribune*, December 3, 2011, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=53037364&itype=CMSID>.

³ Dan Forrest, "The Permission to Fail, the Freedom to Progress," JW Pepper, January 25, 2016, YouTube video, 5:08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2thFk30xwYM>.

⁴ Mike Horanski, "Conversations: VCS' Mike Horanski Interviews Dan Forrest," *Vienna Choral Society*, February 17, 2018, viennachoralsociety.org.

⁵ Forrest, "The Permission to Fail, the Freedom to Progress."

Vienna Choral Society, Forrest gives the following insights into some early influences on creating his melodies and harmonies:

I've had multiple composition teachers who emphasized the importance of line. Joan Pinkston taught me the importance of writing a great line for everyone in the choir or orchestra. Alice Parker taught me to value lines above all else, and help them go where they really want to go.⁶

James Barnes taught me that “amateurs write chords; professionals write counterpoint”. And even in doctoral theory classes studying music psychology and implication-realization, Leonard Meyer’s writings were so insightful about “where melodies want to go”.⁷

I also work on singing the vocal lines I write – I don’t just play them – so they “feel right” with the sounds of the text, and the meaning of the text, and feel satisfying to the singer.⁸

Though successful in multiple compositional genres, choral music is the medium Forrest is most drawn to. He says that he is drawn to the voice as it is the instrument used in choral music.⁹ He continues that “choral music is the ability to say something with the combination of texts and music that adds up to more than the sum of the parts.”¹⁰ This is what attracted him to choral music. In college, Forrest found that, to him, “nothing compared to the sounds and musical dynamics of a choir.”¹¹

His choral music is widely known for his use of idiomatic rhythms that closely align with the text. They are also known “for their sensitivity to the nuances, speech rhythms, and deeper meanings of their texts.”¹² His melodic lines and harmonic movement further illuminate the text

⁶ Horanski, interview.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dan Forrest, “Spirited Conversations: Behind the Scores,” Atlanta Master Chorale, October 5, 2021, YouTube video, 54:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=to9pXRvj0IM>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Brendan Lyons, “The Inside Voice: An Interview with Dan Forrest,” J.W. Pepper blog, January 26, 2016.

¹² Lindsey Lanee Cope, “The Power of Three in Dan Forrest’s Requiem for the Living” (Master’s thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2015).

meanings, bringing a deeper understanding to the texts he has chosen to set. These well-crafted melodies elicit a strong emotional response to the text. Joseph Wilkinson, Conductor of the Meistersingers of Hattiesburg, says, “The music of Dan Forrest leaps into one’s soul at first tone, emotionally connecting both heart and mind through his gift of elegant melodies and evocative harmonies that perfectly mirror the lyrics for which they were meant to bring to life.”¹³ Eric Nelson, the Artistic Director of the Atlanta Master Chorale says, “Forrest has the really great sense of how to find and how to set great poetry.”¹⁴ Forrest says, “Mere poetry sometimes lacks impact; choral music with mere vocalization instead of a beautiful or rich or deep thought in lyric form, often comes up short. It’s the combination of beautiful ideas expressed as beautiful words, set to beautiful music, that I’m after.”¹⁵ Additionally, his professional skill as a pianist and his knowledge and teaching in orchestration emerge in his orchestral writing and polyphonic melodic lines that succeed in keeping the text paramount.

Composer Background

Daniel Ernest Forrest Jr. was born on January 7, 1978, in Elmira, New York. He was raised in Breesport, a small community not far from Ithaca. In an interview with Eric Nelson, Forrest talks about one of his earliest musical memories – cracking open his door after bedtime to hear the music of *Masterpiece Theatre*.¹⁶ At age eight, Forrest began taking piano lessons. He quickly showed a love and desire for the instrument. He was an excellent sight-reader and was quite disciplined in his practice habits. As his talent and abilities continued to grow and

¹³ Joseph Wilkinson, “Then Sings My Soul: An Afternoon with Composer Dan Forrest,” <https://www.facebook.com/events/william-carey-university/then-sings-my-soul-an-afternoon-with-composer-dan-forrest/766059070772111/>.

¹⁴ Forrest, “Spirited Conversations: Behind the Scores.”

¹⁵ Rachel Alessio, “A Choral Conductor’s Guide: Anton Bruckner Trösterin Musik, Charles Hubert Hastings Parry Six Modern Lyrics, Dan Forrest You Are the Music, Pärt Uusberg Muusika, Ron Nelson Proclaim This Day for Music” (Master’s thesis, Southern Illinois University, 2019).

¹⁶ Forrest, “Spirited Conversations: Behind the Scores.”

mature, he had the opportunity to accompany the choirs at his church and school. No doubt, this experience had a great impact planting the initial seed of the love for choral music as he listened and observed.

For Forrest, one of the highlights of each school year was a trip to a choral festival conducted by Dr. Russ Shelley of Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. Forrest's experiences at the festival each year were his first exposures to quality choral music, and it was at these festivals that he learned the foundational elements of choral singing. There he also first heard of composer such as John Rutter (one of Forrest's musical inspirations) and the seeds of his love for choral music were planted and nurtured.¹⁷

Forrest has degrees in piano performance and composition from Bob Jones University and the University of Kansas respectively. It was at the University of Kansas that he studied composition with James Barnes, a great influence on Forrest's compositional career. Although Barnes is almost entirely an instrumental composer, Forrest credits him as the single greatest factor in his compositional growth.¹⁸ Earning a doctoral degree at a state university made it necessary for him to expand his compositional output to the creation of both sacred and secular works. Until that point, Forrest's output consisted solely of sacred anthems for use in the local church. However, the doctoral admissions process forced him for the first time to broaden his musical horizons, resulting in his first secular artistic works: an orchestral suite, a violin sonata, and two choral works.¹⁹

For a few years, he taught piano and composition on the collegiate level, and as a result, has worked with countless numbers of composers and in festivals around the world helping them

¹⁷ John Cornish, "A Conductor's Study of the Compositional Style of Dan Forrest As Illustrated by Analyses of in Paradisum... and Te Deum" (DMA dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 6.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11

¹⁹ Ibid., 10

hone their craft. In 2012, he left his university position and stepped out into full-time composing as well as editing for Beckenhorst Press. He began to participate in numerous workshops and forums as he became a recognized choral composer.²⁰ In addition to his active composing career, Forrest currently serves as Editor at Beckenhorst Press, Chair of the American Choral Director's Association Composition Initiatives Committee and is Artist-In-Residence at Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church (Greenville, SC).²¹

Forrest's work as a composer is motivated by a personal desire and conviction to glorify God, and a desire to create beauty in a world marred by evil. He states,

Whatever abilities I have, for creating beauty, are gifts from God. So, I will make the most beautiful music I can, not because music-making is my ultimate end, but because I want to press my gifts to their maximum potential toward the true ultimate end: glorifying God. This is equally true of my 'secular' music and 'sacred' music, of my concert music and church music.²²

Forrest's compositions include choral, instrumental, orchestral, and wind band works. In each of these categories, he has been very successful, as demonstrated in his receiving the John Ness Beck Foundation Award (2004 – *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*, 2009 – *There is a Fountain*), the Raymond Brock Composition Contest (2005 – *Selah*, a movement from the *Words of Paradise*), the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ACSCAP) Morton Gould Young Composers Award (2006 – *Holy, Hosanna*, and *Amen* – three other movements from the *Words of Paradise*). Additionally, he was a finalist in the Frank Ticheli International Wind Band Composition Contest.²³ His first place in 2004 in the John Ness Beck Award was significant for Forrest because one of his composer models, John Rutter, placed

²⁰ Forrest, "About Dan Forrest."

²¹ Ibid.

²² Dan Forrest, *What I Believe*, <https://danforrest.com/what-i-believe/>, 2020.

²³ Wikipedia contributors, "Dan Forrest," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, Accessed November 8, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dan_Forrest&oldid=1142142801.

second. Further demonstration of his level of influence as a composer is supported by his choral works having been recorded by professional choirs including Seraphic Fire and VOCES8. His works have been featured on the BBC Proms series and numerous national US radio and TV broadcasts, and are regularly performed in Carnegie Hall choral festivals and other prominent international venues.

In addition to *the breath of life*, Forrest also composed smaller choral works that also spoke to the nature of the pandemic. A few of those pieces are: *Light Beyond Shadow*, *fermata* (written for choirs to express their loss during pandemic – available as a FREE gift to the global choral community), *Shalom* (a “passing of the peace” using the Jewish word for wholeness and well-being), and a setting of the beloved hymn, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*.”

Introduction to *the breath of life*

Forrest’s latest large-scale work, *the breath of life*, has brought him full circle, back to one of the first choral ensembles he ever worked with. The Hickory Choral Society in North Carolina commissioned his ‘*Requiem for the Living*,’ which was the first large-scale, multi-movement piece that Forrest composed. “They sort of took a chance on me, back then I didn’t have the reputation, so ten years later I’ve come back to write a piece to honor the conductor who originally commissioned that piece.”²⁴ *the breath of life* is an evocative reflection on the beauty and joy of new life juxtaposed with the pain of loss.²⁵ “Forrest creates a rich and poignant soundscape using life sounds, electronic sounds, voices, and orchestra intertwined with profound and compelling texts from scripture as well as classic and modern poetry. The emotional arc of

²⁴ Vincent Harris, “Meet an Acclaimed Composer in Greenville’s own backyard,” *Greenville Journal*, March 9, 2022.

²⁵ Timothy H. Lindeman, “Bel Canto Company Presents Joyful Noise: A Celebration of Life Featuring the Music of Dan Forrest,” review of *the breath of life*, *CNVC Journal*, October 12, 2019.

the music beautifully mirrors that of life—from the miracle of birth to the bereavement of death, the love that makes life meaningful, and the human breath that connects us all.”²⁶ Similar to a song cycle in choral literature, Forrest has created from four texts, a complete four-stage cycle of human life that radiates to every human being and collectively gives the structure of the work, *the breath of life*.

Completed in 2019 and published in 2020 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the breath of life has begun to impact audiences worldwide; its poignant texts speaking to the loss of life and the use of stopped breath to provide imagery evokes an understanding of all humanity, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or social status. “I’d like to think that God made me to write music,” he says, “and when I do a good job at it, I can feel God’s pleasure in doing what I was made to do. And it’s such a beautiful way to minister to people in terms of providing music for comfort, music for celebration, music for memorials, music that speaks peace or hope or seeks to bind up wounds or provide healing when there’s brokenness.”²⁷ This statement is precisely why the author believes *the breath of life* will have a profound impact in the choral world.

Forrest’s *the breath of life* is not bound by any specific choral form. It does not follow the form of an anthem, an oratorio, or even a requiem. Similarly, his *Requiem for the Living*, undeniably his most performed large-scale work, does not even follow a standard structure or historical pattern. “Though usually a genre reserved for the departed, Forrest’s Requiem is unique in its dedication to those still living. “Requiem,” meaning “rest,” is needed by the dead and the living alike, Forrest argues. It is hard to argue against the point, and Forrest follows through on his assertion with one of the finest requiems written to date.”²⁸ Conductor Ndaru

²⁶Dan Forrest, *the breath-of-life*, <https://danforrest.com/music-catalog/the-breath-of-life/>, 2020.

²⁷ Harris, “Meet an Acclaimed Composer in Greenville’s own backyard.”

²⁸ Lyons, “The Inside Voice: An Interview with Dan Forrest.”

Darsono of the Jakarta Festival Chorus, said in referring to Forrest's Requiem, "It does not aim to pray for the dead but to the living – those who face a lot of problems and those who are so busy that they do not have time to rest."²⁹

Similarly, Ralph Vaughn Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* had a significant effect on the musical and non-musical world alike. In 2014, in the Oxford University Press's *Academic Insights for the Thinking World*, Hugh Cobbe writes:

The cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem* by Ralph Vaughan Williams was written at a time when the country was slowly awakening to the possibility of a second European conflict. When invited to provide a work for the centenary of the Huddersfield Choral Society in October 1936, Vaughan Williams remembered that he had in his drawer an unpublished setting of Walt Whitman's 'Dirge for Two Veterans', taken from Whitman's 1865 collection *Drum Taps* inspired by the American Civil War which had just ended. Vaughan Williams had written it in 1911 before the First World War, and now resurrected it as the centrepiece of this new work. In the last two sections he used a series of passages drawn from the Old Testament which together express optimism for future peace. The text is rounded off with the verse from St Luke 'Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, Good will towards men' and a final repetition of the plea 'Grant us peace' in the work's title.

Dona Nobis Pacem was performed many times in that anxious period leading up to the Second World War, and given its connections with both World Wars it is again being taken up by choral societies throughout the country as we come to commemorate the outbreak of the First. The work reminds us that war inevitably brings misery and loss.³⁰

This is not to say that Forrest's work, *the breath of life* will have a comparable effect on the entire western world as *Dona Nobis Pacem*, but in our time of loss – life, time, emotion, relations experienced during the pandemic, the author believes this piece will be influential in aiding healing in the choral society today and helping to bring back the joy of choral music both to singers and audiences alike.

²⁹ Kurniawan Ulung, "Finding Peace through Dan Forrest's Tunes," *The Jakarta Post*, August 8, 2017.

³⁰ Hugh Cobbe, *Academic Insights for the Thinking World. Dona nobis pacem by Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Commission and Premiere of *the breath of life*

The world premiere performance of Dan Forrest's, *the breath of life*, was recorded live on October 14, 2019, by Bel Canto Company featuring Dan Forrest (piano) and Sharon Gerber (solo cello). "*the breath of life* was commissioned in memory of Suzanne Goddard, one of Bel Canto Company's most ardent fans and dearest friends. Suzanne loved choral music, and we are elated to honor her life and spirit through this moving and timeless new work." ³¹

Literature Review

Information on Forrest's compositional techniques can be found in "The Power of Three in Dan Forrest's Requiem for the Living" by Lindsey Lane Cope. Another dissertation that discusses Forrest's compositional devices on previous works is "A Conductor's Study of the Compositional Style of Dan Forrest as Illustrated by Analyses of in Paradisum... and Te Deum" by John Cornish.

The author has examined some writings dealing with commissioned musical works. One is Michelle Kesler's "Commissioned Works for Cello by Composers Christian Asplund and Joseph Hallman through Analytical Studies," a dissertation pertaining to commissioned works.

A dissertation by Imhye Cho entitled "Five Pieces for Piano by Isang Yun and Piano Etude No.1 by Unsuk Chin: An Analysis" was explored as a guide for studying newly composed works.

Another dissertation examined, written about analysis and performing new works by Paul Edward Futer, is "Discovering Three New Solo Works for Trumpet: A Guide to the History,

³¹ The Choral Arts Collective, "the breath of life (Feat, Dan Forrest)", <https://choralartscollective.com/discography/the-breath-of-life-feat-dan-forrest/>.

Analysis, and Preparation of Anthony Plog's Sonata, Martin Rokeach's Running at the Top of the World, and Charles Reskin's Sonata for Trumpet and Piano.”

The exploration of acousmatic electronics in live performance may be found in "DIY in Early Live Electroacoustic Music: John Cage, Gordon Mumma, David Tudor, and the Migration of Live Electronics from the Studio to Performance," a dissertation by Lindsey Elizabeth Hartman.

Reviews, interviews, roundtables, articles and recordings of performances both academic and professional will be used to help explore what Forrest's emotional intentions are. Some of the contributors of interviews and recordings are Eric Nelson, Atlanta Master Chorale and Emory University, Welborn Young, Bel Canto Music Company, the Montclair State University Chorale, and the Meistersingers of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. These are found on the platforms of YouTube and specific organization's websites. A choral music review written by Timothy H. Lindeman of the premiere Bel Canto performance was found in CNVC, an online arts journal of North Carolina. This performance included *the breath of life*, and another major work, *Jubilate Deo*, both by Forrest. In his review, Lindeman writes on the exquisite tuning and intonation of the singers, the attention to Forrest's contrasting dynamic, and the audience's response.³² Many other links to Forrest's musical compositions, articles and reviews are available through his Wikipedia website.

The author has examined and will continue to explore Forrest's other choral works to gain understanding in his compositional techniques. Some of these larger works include *Requiem for the Living*, *Jubilate Deo*, and *Lux: the Dawn from on High*. Other smaller choral

³² Lindeman, "Bel Canto Company Presents Joyful Noise."

works will also be used in the exploration of Forrest's writing. More theses and dissertations may be found and examined as the author continues to research other writer's work on living composers that would aid in the understanding and clarification for this dissertation.

The study of compositional elements found within his substantive existing compositional output will further inform this study. Reading and studying these scholarly documents will help in formatting, guiding research objectives, and analyzing *the breath of life*.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained to conduct this study (see Appendix A). This author was also granted permission by Dan Forrest to use music examples from his composition (see Appendix B).

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS USED IN *THE BREATH OF LIFE*

Background

The breath of life sets four deeply profound texts from a variety of sources: the opening Bible verses from Genesis “et Deus inspiravit” (and God breathed); a poem about the beginning and ending of life by Antler, the former poet laureate of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; a poem by William Butler Yeats; and a 1904 poem by Henry Van Dyke. Each of these poetic works has a great impact on its own but when used in conjunction with each other and with the melodic ideas in this work, the accessibility and relatability to musicians and non-musicians is compounded.

The opening movement of *the breath of life* uses a biblical text from the book of Genesis. Forrest uses the Latin text, “et Deus inspiravit”.

Text of “et Deus inspiravit”... (and God breathed...) (from Genesis 2:7, Vulgate)

Et Deus inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae;
et factus est homo in animam viventem.

*(and God breathed into him the breath of life;
and man became a living soul.)*

Background and Analysis of Genesis 2:7

There is the moment when all human life begins. In the Bible, Genesis 1 describes the creation of the entire universe. As part of that story, men and women are also formed (Genesis 1:27). Genesis chapter 2 narrows focus on the creation of the first man, giving additional details, and helping us to see that humanity is special among all the rest of creation.

In Genesis 1:1, God's creation is described using the term *bā'rā*, which implies "creation" in the sense of "coming into being," or of "something from nothing." But here, in Genesis 2:7, the creation of the first human being uses the Hebrew word for "formed:" *yi'ser*. This describes the actions of an artist, a sculptor, or a potter. This term is specific in that it always refers to work done on some existing substance. In this case, God is forming human life from the ground itself. That Hebrew word is *ā'pār*, which refers to dirt, powder, debris, or ash.³³

Following the storyline of this verse, after being "formed," man was merely a lump of well-formed dirt. It's what God did next that made mankind alive: He breathed into the man's nose the breath of life. Literally, God breathed life into the lump, transforming it into a living being, or "creature," or "soul."

According to this text, all of life originated with God, but human life began with the personal breath of God. Without God, man simply would not live. The name Adam is directly from the Hebrew *ā'dām*, which literally means "man." Adam reflects the dust from which people were formed: the Hebrew word for ground is *adamah*.³⁴

The text of the second movement of *the breath of life* uses poetry written by Brad Burwick, whose pseudonym is Antler.

Text of "first breath last breath" (Antler, 2006)

When a baby boy is born
and the midwife
holds him up
as he takes
his first breath,
Place him over
the Mother's face
so when the baby exhales

³³ BibleRef, "Adamah", <https://www.bibleref.com/Genesis/2/Genesis-2-7.html>.

³⁴ Ibid.

his first breath on Earth
the Mother breathes it.

And when the Mother dies,
her middle-aged son
the baby grew up to be —
by her side,
his head next to her head —
Follows her breathing with his breath
as it becomes shorter,
and as the dying Mother
exhales her last breath
her son inhales it.

Background and Analysis of “first breath last breath”

This poem, which Forrest uses as the second movement for this work will receive more in-depth analysis because of the pivotal importance it has in the entire work.

Brad Burdick, an American poet born in 1946, lives in Wisconsin. The pseudonym he uses in his writings is “Antler.” He has degrees in both anthropology and English from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. As his writing career has progressed, Antler has been presented with several prestigious awards. In 1985, Antler received the Whitman Prize from the Walt Whitman Association, given to the poet “whose contribution best reveals the continuing presence of Walt Whitman in American poetry.” Antler also was awarded the Witter Bynner prize in 1987. Antler was the poet laureate of the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for 2002 and 2003. Allen Ginsberg declared him as “one of Whitman's `poets and orators to come””.³⁵ He also has published poetry works in journals, books, and collections.

In an interview Forrest gave with the Montclair State University ACDA student chapter, he talks of how he found this text and the process and time it took to be able to use this text with

³⁵ Wikipedia contributors, “Antler (poet),” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed December 5, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Antler_\(poet\)&oldid=1147098784](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Antler_(poet)&oldid=1147098784) ().

proper permission.³⁶ He says that the text “first breath last breath” was one of the most difficult texts to get permission to use. He found it online and thought it was “one of the most poignantly written texts” he had ever seen. This text had an immediate impact on him. It “sang” to him. He began to investigate the poet, Antler, and found an old dead website. After inquiring with no responses, he reached out to publishing companies who also had no contact information for Antler. He also found a video of the poet reading his poetry but could find no other contact info. He finally found his real name, Brad Burdick. He found information that gave some info that Antler lived many months off the grid. Through the use of online tools and demographic elimination, Forrest found a Brad Burdick that fit the approximate profile of Antler and his living location near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He called the phone number listed and recognized the voice of Antler from the video of him reading his poetry that Forrest had watched online. After receiving no responses from voicemail messages left, he resorted to sending a letter to the address he found online. When he returned from a time away, there was letter waiting for him from Antler. In short, Antler gave him permission to use this poem in this work.³⁷

“First breath last breath” is primarily a poem that addresses the beginning and end of life. The central theme of this poem is the beginning and the end of life. Antler manages to translate through words the cycle of life, using two characters – a baby boy and the child’s mother. There seems to be an obvious relationship that develops between mother and child. The cycle is presented by the event of birth of a child and the death of the mother who gave him life. This poem is also about love, the love between a mother and her “baby boy”.³⁸

³⁶ “Dan Forrest, “the breath of life by Dan Forrest: Composer Interview with Montclair State University ACDA”, February 11, 2022, YouTube video, 30:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTGGeGp62Kg>.

³⁷ Dan Forrest, Interview with Montclair University ACDA, 2022.

³⁸ Study Mode Research, “Analysis of ‘First breath last breath,’” <https://www.studymode.com/essays/First-Breath-Last-Breath-By-Antler-962128.html2>.

The title of the poem “First Breath Last Breath” is composed of two separate stages in life but shows the correlation between the two. “Breath” by definition means the air inhaled and exhaled in a life-giving action but it could also mean life, spirit or vitality. “First breath” relays the idea of the beginning of life while “last breath” portrays the end of life. We see the “first” in the ninth line “his first breath on Earth” reemphasizing the beginning. We see the “last” in the second stanza, ninth line “exhales her last breath.” This reemphasizes the topic of the second stanza – the end.

Structurally, this poem is in essence only two sentences. But the way that Antler has set each sentence, gives great meaning and flow as a complete line as well as many individual ideas within. This structure gives the author flexibility, writing this poem like he is writing a story. He is breaking up the sentence into various intervals in order to create “musicality” among the last words of each line.³⁹ A simple summary of the poem could look like this:

“When a baby boy is born – his first breath on Earth/the Mother breathes it”

and

“When the Mother dies – exhales her last breath,/her son inhales it”

The main character focus of this poem is the boy while the mother is the secondary character. It is the boy who, at the beginning of his life, is near his mother (“place him over/the Mother’s face”), while during all his life he stands by his mother (“the baby grew up to be--/by her side”) and when the end of his mother’s life is imminent, he is still near her (“And when the other dies/.../his head next to her head—”). This shows the great bond a mother has with her child.

³⁹ Study Mode Research, “Analysis of ‘First breath last breath.’”

When the baby boy takes his first breath it represents new life/vitality. Life in the world has now begun. But the fact that the son “inhales” “her last breath” could have another significance. ‘Breath’ also means “spirit”, and the son might inhale her spirit to always be with her, to always remember her. A single bond is evident, where mother and child are close to each other. This unity could be present in the words “follows her breathing with his breath”.

William Butler Yeats poem, “the silent kiss” is the text Forrest has chosen for the third movement of *the breath of life*.

Text of “the silent kiss”

In the long echoing street the laughing dancers throng,
The bride is carried to the bridegroom’s chamber
through torchlight and tumultuous song;
I celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long.

Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;
Never to have drawn the breath of life,
never to have looked into the eye of day;
The second best’s a soft goodnight and quickly turn away.

Background and Analysis of “the silent kiss”

“A Man Young and Old: XI. From Oedipus at Colonus” by William Butler Yeats, from where Forrest takes these stanzas, seems to be the lament of life. The whole poem is structured in four stanzas of triplets with an AAA BBB CCC etc. rhyme scheme. The first triplet stanza makes it clear that long life is not to be desired and that once a person grows old, the person's delight becomes longing for death. The second stanza also refers to the word “delight” but this time to the delights of fond memories, which, the speaker tells us, harbor the hidden realities of deaths, loss of hope (despair) and family estrangements etc. We are reminded that homeless wandering

beggars and equally homeless and unloved children know the truth of what stanza two describes as being embodied in memories.⁴⁰

Stanza three, where Forrest begins its use, contrasts stanzas one and two by describing a bride and bridegroom and their joyous, singing bridal party as the groom carries his bride through the darkness lit only by torches and song. This is analogous of the looming, impending ideas brought forth in stanzas one and two. The speaker contrasts his personal celebration to their celebration saying that s/he celebrates the unreturned and silent kiss given to one who has died.⁴¹ Making it clear that the same idea and feeling applies to one who dies no matter their age; Yeats ends by saying that ancient sages pronounce the best thing that could happen to a person – never to have been born; to never have breathed the air of life; never to have beheld the glories of day light. Yeats joins in the sentiment and says that, after finding yourself alive, the next best thing is to enjoy the present and forget everyone as soon as you curtly and absolutely part from them-- have no human bonds or affections: “a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.”⁴²

The text that Forrest uses in the final movement of *the breath of life* is entitled, “epilogue: time is”. This text was written by Henry Van Dyke.

Text of “epilogue: time is”

Time is
 Too Slow for those who Wait,
 Too Swift for those who Fear,
 Too Long for those who Grieve,
 Too Short for those who Rejoice;
 But for those who Love...
 ...Time is not.

⁴⁰ "What is the meaning of the poem "A Man young and Old : XI. From Oedipus at Colonus"? " *eNotes Editorial*, 31 Dec. 2009, <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-meaning-poem-how-related-oedipus-king-man-123633>. Accessed 18 Oct. 2022.

⁴¹ Blog entitled, “What is the meaning of the poem "A Man young and Old : XI. From Oedipus at Colonus"? September 26, 2010.

⁴² Ibid.

Background and Analysis of “Time Is”

“Time Is”, one of the best poems by Dyke, first appeared in “Music and Other Poems” in 1904. The poem is also known by the name, ‘*For Katrina’s Sundial*’. Dyke composed this poem as an inscription on a sundial. The sundial was set in the garden of an estate owned by his friends Spencer and Katrina Trask. The second edition of the poem was read at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales;⁴³ however, in some versions of the poem, there is “Eternity” in place of “not” in the last line, “Time is not.” This poem also inspired some songs composed on the theme of time.⁴⁴

This poem, “Time Is”, deals with mankind’s perception of time and how love has the power to make him feel as if he is transcending the boundaries of time itself.⁴⁵ According to Das Gupta, time dictates so much of our lives and experiences, and we are bound to pay reverence to its passage, regardless of whether we desire to or not.⁴⁶

This poem challenges the reader to contemplate how time is ever changing. Time is not constant. It is different at times for each individual and varies from person to person. Only one can surpass the limitation of time through love. However, the poet captures how time moves, through a set of contrasts. Time depends on how one treats it. And the treatment of time depends on the thoughts a person is preoccupied with.⁴⁷

The beginning of *epilogue: time is* has very contrasting ideas. At first, Dyke says time is too slow for those who wait. In contrast, time is too swift for those who fear it. Those who

⁴³ "The Funeral Service of Diana, Princess Wales: Order of Service". BBC. 6 September 1997.

⁴⁴ Sudip Das Gupta, "Time Is by Henry van Dyke", *Poem Analysis*, 29 May 2021, <https://poemanalysis.com/henry-van-dyke/time-is/>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

grieve, feel time is too long. However, those who are rejoicing in life, feel the time is too short on earth. But those who love, don't preoccupy their minds with such thoughts of time. Love is eternal and forever. Because of this, lovers don't care much about time. And time has no control over them.⁴⁸

Van Dyke describes opposite moments of time – moving slowly and moving quickly.⁴⁹ As one ponders and waits for something, time often moves slowly. All kinds of waiting are liable to have this result. The opposite is also true, if one focuses only on the future, they will always be waiting. For those who are fearful of death, they will one day discover that death has approached far too early and often without warning. But, in either instance, one thinks that time is moving too quickly.

Concluding Thought

After looking at the four movements and the texts that Forrest chose for *the breath of life*, all the texts work in harmony together to follow the overarching theme from the beginning of life to the inevitable death that comes to man. These texts speak to many who hear them read, but they tend to come more alive when put to music as Forrest has done in this work.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER III

MUSICAL FORM AND COMPOSITIONAL DETAILS OF FORREST'S *THE BREATH OF LIFE*

Introduction to Analysis Chapters

The following two chapters will be analytically focused on specific concepts that are critical to the conductor's interpretation of this work. These concepts will include melody, harmony, form, textual and musical relations, and compositional techniques. Chapter III—a specific focus on the musical forms—will contain a brief overview of the complete form followed by a detailed analysis of each movement. Forrest's feelings on the somewhat difficult task of relating text and music will also be discussed.

Chapter IV will focus mainly on the compositional techniques Forrest uses throughout the work to add interest and bring the work to life. These will include specific vocal techniques for the singers, and computer-generated sounds. In addition, specific intervallic relationships between singers and instruments to tie the text and music together will be shown.

Musical Form

When a musician begins to study or analyze a piece of music, it is important to understand the overarching formal structure of that piece. The *Oxford Companion to Music* states that musical form can be defined as the way in which the “various elements of a piece of music—such as its pitches, rhythms, dynamics, and timbres—are organized in order to make it

coherent to a listener.”⁵⁰ When Forrest was asked about his own thoughts on musical form by John Cornish, he stated that the “simplest way to understand it is to first consider two very different processes by which any work (and its form) can be conceived by a composer. The first can be thought of as a “top-down” approach, whereas the second is the opposite, a “bottom-up” approach.”⁵¹

In a top-down approach, the composer first imagines and plans the overall concept for the work, the thirty-thousand-foot view. He will then create all of the little musical ideas (e.g., motives, themes, and phrases) to fit within his visualized plan. In the “bottom-up” approach, the composer first generates the smaller musical ideas before beginning to construct the work by adding all the small pieces back together to form the large overall work he has visualized.

Forrest’s many years of experience composing have led to his belief that musical creation rarely falls into a clearly defined process.

In my experience (both in writing, and in talking to other composers), every piece is a bit different. Sometimes it starts bottom and works up; sometimes it starts top and works down. Most commonly, pieces work both ways. In other words, a composer may start with a little motive, but he can't work with it very long without needing to think about what role that motive will play in the bigger picture, or how the bigger picture will take shape based on that motive. Similarly, if a composer starts with a big picture idea, he can't work on it very long without needing to find the little pieces and parts (motives) out of which he might construct that big picture.⁵²

When beginning to create a new work, Forrest at times has incorporated both the larger and smaller processes. He says that he creates so that each work eventually will “meet in the

⁵⁰ Denis Arnold et al., "Form," In *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham, Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2624> (accessed October 3, 2022).

⁵¹ John Cornish, “A Conductor’s Study,” 53.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 54.

middle.”⁵³ This composing process is used by Forrest no matter if the piece has evolved out of the “top-down” or “bottom-up” approach in his composing.

Another issue that Forrest discusses with Cornish is the idea of musical unity vs. musical diversity.⁵⁴ Forrest believes that for a musical work to be considered good or successful, it must have a good balance of both unity and diversity. He states:

“if a piece is all diversity, it doesn't hold together. It just assaults the listener with a barrage of unrelated ideas, and the listener can't make sense of the piece. This helps explain why people don't like a lot of 20th century music: it sounds like all diversity to them, and they can't perceive the underlying unity.” On the other hand, he notes that “if a piece is all unity, it doesn't keep the listener's attention—it just repeats the same idea over and over, ad nauseam. This helps explain why people don't like minimalism (at least some types of minimalism). It feels like 100% unity, without any diversity to keep our interest.”⁵⁵

Because of this perspective, Forrest is constantly looking to keep a healthy balance of the two in his compositions.

Formal Structure of “et Deus inspiravit”

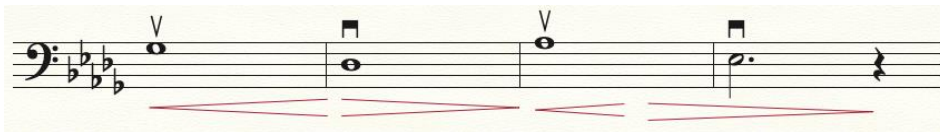
A simple listen and quick analysis of “et Deus inspiravit” by any musician would immediately point to a simple harmonic pattern that repeats itself over and over. This is the epitome of the *chaconne* style of composition. A *chaconne* is a type of musical composition often used as a vehicle for variation on a repeated short harmonic progression, often involving a fairly short repetitive bassline or ground bass (see Example 1) which offers a compositional outline for variation, decoration, figuration and melodic invention.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid, 54.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 55.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 55.

⁵⁶ Alexander Silbiger, “Passacaglia,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition, edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2001).



Example 1. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, double bass, *chaconne* figure that repeats throughout movement, mm. 9-12.

This harmonic progression (Gb major – Db major – Ab Major – Eb minor) is followed almost exclusively in this movement. There are a couple variant chords that are interspersed to give a slight harmonic change, while the bass line remains fairly static harmonically sometime changing the inversion of the chord (see Example 2 and Example 3).

Example 2. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, strings, slight variation in harmonic progression changing second chord to Bb minor, mm. 24-28.

(unis.; end solo)

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Solo Vc.

Vc. 1, 2

D.B.

Example 3. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, strings, slight variation in harmonic progression changing third chord to f minor, and mixing up progression, mm. 73-76.

Another feature of the *chaconne* is the increasing activity that happens overtop of the bassline. This is seen in this movement as it progresses in excitement and activity. Forrest uses rhythmic diminution to accomplish this. He begins with whole notes, then half notes, then quarter notes, which then transpire into eighth notes and eventually into sixteenth notes.

The harmonic progression also varies between differing rhythmic values. Not only does the orchestration show these changes in rhythmic values, but so do the vocal lines (see Examples 4-7). The text is elongated in whole-note values at the beginning which then morphs through different variations of quicker rhythms as the movement progresses.

29 *each phrase emerges from nothing and returns to nothing* *p* (simile- continue four-bar phrase shapes)

S. A. Et De - us in - spi -

each phrase emerges from nothing and returns to nothing *p* (simile- continue four-bar phrase shapes)

T. B.

Example 4. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, whole note theme, mm 29-34.

85

S. A. in - spi - ra - vit, vi - tae, vi - tae,

spi - ra - cu - lum vi - tae,

T. B.

Example 5. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, half note theme, mm 85-88.

89 *mf* *poco a poco cresc.*

S. A. Et De - us in - spi - ra - vit in fa - ciem e - ius

mf *poco a poco cresc.*

T. B.

Example 6. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, quarter note theme, mm 89-92.

107 **E** Back in tempo ♩ = c. 66 *p*

S. A. (Mm) (Mm)

stronger now *mf*

T. B. et fac-tus, et fac - tus est in a - ni - mam vi - ven - tem,

Example 7. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, eighth note theme in men’s voices, mm 107-110.

Eventually, it all comes together at measure 85 with a greater culmination of all rhythmic figures at rehearsal G (see Example 8) where the key then modulates to Eb Major before returning back to the original key to conclude the movement. The lower instruments keep the longer harmonic progression going while the other instruments play a triplet pattern or double the vocal lines while the choir is singing quarter note and half note rhythms, and the soloist is singing in whole notes.

145 **G** *Piu mosso* $\text{♩} = c. 102$
f SOPRANO SOLO

S. Solo
 et fac - tus est in

S. A. **ff**
 Et fac - tus, et fac - tus est,

T. B. **ff**
 fac - tus, et fac - tus est,

Pno. **ff**

Perc. 1 Kick Drum **f**

Perc. 2 Timpani **f**

G *Piu mosso* $\text{♩} = c. 102$

Vln. I **ff** *legato*

Vln. II **ff** *legato*

Vla. **ff** *legato*

Solo Vc. **ff** *legato*

Vc. 1, 2 **ff** *legato*

D.B. **ff** *legato*

Org./MIDI **f**
 Ch.

Example 8. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, full score showing differing rhythmic figures melded together, rehearsal G.

The harmonic progression of the *chaconne* is ever present throughout this movement, while Forrest follows the pattern of the increased rhythmic activity above the ground bass. This gives great excitement to the listener as they realize the climax of musicality is being manifested. This is accomplished by the rhythmic intensity found in the orchestra. This culmination of rhythm is found in measures 161 to the end of the movement with the greatest intensity being in measures 169-171 (see Example 9).

169

S. A.
in - spi - ra - vit, spi - ra - cu - lum vi - tae, vi - tae.

T. B.

Pno.

Perc. 1
(4-bar pattern repeats)

Perc. 2

Vln. I
heavy spiccato

Vln. II
heavy spiccato

Vla.
heavy spiccato

Solo Vc.

Vc. 1, 2

D.B.

Org./MIDI
-Mixtures
+Oboe

+Ped. 32'

Example 9. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, rhythmic intensity in orchestra, mm. 169-171.

Formal Structure of “first breath last breath”

“First breath last breath” (2006), the second movement of *the breath of life*, is a poem by Brad Burdick, (pseudonym: Antler) that discusses the beginning and ending of life. The singers audible breathing, accompanied by harmonics in the upper strings, and MIDI produced sounds by the organ or computer patch (see Example 10), all work together to produce an ethereal feeling that begins to evoke the feeling of the beginning of life and that first breath that is taken. Table 1 has been created to give the overall outline for this movement.

Andante, semplice e molto rubato ♩ = c. 60-70
Gentle but audible breaths (may not need whole choir)

Violin I
pp
Vln 2 outer stands: harmonics shown are sounding pitches; play artificial harmonics, sul G or D

Violin II
pp
Vln 2 inner stands are not harmonics, but match harmonics' tone (con sordino, sul tasto/flautando)

Viola
pp
con sordino, sul tasto/flautando, to match violin harmonics' tone; may be played by outer stands only, for balance, if needed

MIDI Keyboard
mp
MIDI (if a smaller controller/keyboard is used, omit top octave doublings)

Percussion TACET Movement 2

Example 10. Opening of “first breath last breath”, audible breaths, harmonic strings, MIDI keyboard.

Table 1. Dan Forrest, “first breath last breath”, section outline chart

	Measures	Key	Choral	Instrumentation	Text
Introduction	1-11	Ab	Breaths	Electronic ambient sound Upper strings	
A Section	12-25	Ab	Text	A cappella	When a baby...
Interlude	26-31	Ab	Breaths	Electronic ambient sound Upper strings	
B Section	32-66	Ab	Text	A cappella Solo cello ms. 48	Place him over...
Interlude	67-78	Bb		Strings, piano	
Bridge	79-82	fm	Breaths	Electronic ambient sound Upper strings, piano	
C Section	83-99	Ab	Text	A cappella Solo cello ms. 93	And when the mother dies...
Bridge	100-102	Ab		Sparse piano	
D Section	103-130	Ab	Text	String harmonics	Follows her breathing...
Interlude	131-146	Ab	Choral “Ah”	Strings, piano	Ah...
E Section	147-155	Ab	Text	A cappella	Her son breaths it...
Interlude	156-158	fm		Piano w/main theme	
Codetta	159-170	fm	Text	Strings, piano	His first breath... Her last breath...
Ending	171-174	fm		Electronic ambient sound Upper strings, piano	

The primary key center of the second movement is A-flat major but there is a shift back and forth at times with the relative key of f minor. This shifting between key centers gives the movement a constant feel of “breathing.” The breath slows and disappears only to reemerge later in the movement.

Forrest mentioned in an interview that the interlude that begins in measure sixty-seven where the music moves into the key of B-flat major (see Example 11) is one of his favorite moments in the piece. This is the final reiteration of the text “the Mother breathes it” symbolizing that she has captured this first breath of her newborn boy as he entered the world.

60 *mf* *rit.* **C** *a tempo*

S
Moth - er, the Moth - er breathes

A
Moth - er, the Moth - er, the Moth - er breathes

T
Moth - er Moth - er, the Moth - er breathes

B
mf
Moth - er, Moth - er, Moth - er breathes

Pno.

mf

rit. **C** *a tempo*

Vln. I
mf *espress.*
senza sordino

Vln. II
mf *espress.*
senza sordino

Vla.
mf *espress.*

Solo Vc.
mf *espress.*

Vc. 1, 2
mf *espress.*

D.B.
mf *espress.*

MIDI

Example 11. Dan Forrest, “first breath last breath”, Forrest’s favorite modulation to Bb M.

The harmonic shift in key center comes to its final resting spot when f minor appears and stays in the interlude preceding the final codetta where the text, “His first breath, her last breath...” is reemphasized. Forrest ends “first breath, last breath” in the key of f minor which seamlessly transitions into the third movement.

Formal Structure of “the silent kiss”

“The silent kiss” is the third movement in *the breath of life*. Forrest follows the composition style of a *passacaglia*. A *passacaglia* is a musical form that “originated in Spain in the early-seventeenth century and is characterized by a serious demeanor with a bass ostinato.”⁵⁷ This motive usually persistently repeats in the same musical voice and often on the same musical pitches.⁵⁸ This musical form has been used throughout musical history by composers such as Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi of the Baroque era, and Mendelssohn and Brahms of the Romantic era. Benjamin Britten of the Contemporary era is said to have often used the *passacaglia* to create the climactic moment of the drama.⁵⁹ It could be said that Forrest is also creating that serious moment of drama.

Forrest follows the *passacaglia* technique in this movement. With the serious tone set up by the presence of the key of f minor as well as the downward motion of the bass line that represents sinking into the oblivion of death at times, Forrest is capturing the emotion of the text and is certainly creating a climactic moment of sadness. In an interview with Montclair University ACDA, Forrest said that the repeating bass motion of the bass moving downward (see Examples 12 and 13) until hitting rock bottom helps to paint what the text is trying to say.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷ Silbiger, “Passacaglia.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Darrell Handel, “Britten's Use of the Passacaglia,” *Tempo*, new series no. 94 (Autumn): 2–6. 1970.

⁶⁰ Forrest, Interview with Montclair State University ACDA.

music adds impact and weight to Yeats' poetry, lamenting the loss of life and vulnerably questioning whether the breath of life was worth drawing or celebrating.⁶¹

Example 12. Dan Forrest, “the silent kiss”, bass line in piano following passacaglia pattern, mm. 1-7.

Example 13. Dan Forrest, “the silent kiss”, double bass line showing continuation of *passacaglia*, mm. 91-98.

The phrase, “I celebrate the silent kiss...” is used by Forrest throughout the movement to emphasize this feeling of death and loss. This text continues to be given attention as it is reiterated even while the other lines of text continue (see Example 14).

⁶¹ Dan Forrest, Program Notes written by the composer, <https://danforrest.com/music-catalog/the-breath-of-life/>.

31

S

A

T

B

mp

pp < mp

In the long ech - o - ing street the laugh - ing danc - ers throug -

I cel - e - brate the

Example 14. Dan Forrest, “the silent kiss” overlaying of “I celebrate the silent kiss...”, mm. 33-37.

It is used as an interjection of remembrance as all voices sing this text homophonically at rehearsal B and at measure eighty-one (see Examples 15 and 16).

45

S

A

T

B

mf **B**

I cel - e - brate the si - lent kiss, _____

tu - mul - tuous song, _____ I cel - e - brate the si - lent kiss, _____ the

tu - mul - tuous song, _____ I cel - e - brate the si - lent kiss, _____

tu - mul - tuous song, _____ I cel - e - brate the si - lent kiss, _____

Example 15. Dan Forrest, “the silent kiss”, homophonic text, “I celebrate the silent kiss...” in all voices, measure 48-50.

swift” in measure thirty (see Example 19). This is the only use of sixteenth notes in the movement which adequately portray the swiftness of time.

27

S1 Time, Time, Time is Too Swift

S2 Time, Time is Too Swift

A1 Time, Time is Too Swift

A2 Time is, Time is, Time is Too Swift

T1 Time is, Time is Too Swift for those

T2 Time is, Time is Too Swift for those

B1 Time is, Time is Too Swift for those

B2 Time is, Time is Too Swift for those

Example 19. Dan Forrest, “epilogue: time is”, sixteenth note use, measure 30.

This very briefly breaks up the monotonous feeling of extended time and the never changing clocks that remind us that time continues and doesn't wait for mankind to catch up.

In the closing program notes of this movement, Forrest ends with the following thought:

The clockwork ends as the strings enter, and we soar above earth, looking down to ponder how Love can make life, and even its loss, worthwhile. A bit of the clockwork returns briefly, reminding us of where we still are in time and space; then the final word gives way to a reprise of the "breath of God" themes from the first movement, presented this time in slow motion, almost like a dream. The work's enigmatic ending provides space for pondering its meaning for our own lives on multiple levels (see Example 20).⁶³

⁶³ Ibid.

104 6 times, poco a poco dim. a niente

Audible breath (may not need whole choir)

p

S1
1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

S2
1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

A1
1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

A2
1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

T1
1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

T2

B1

B2

Pno.
Final time, keep pedal down to the end

Perc. 1
gradually fade out at the same rate as electronic ambient

(Strike a different random triangle on beat 1, each repeat)

(Continue poco a poco dim. a niente)

(Strike a different random triangle, one at a time, every few seconds; gradually slow down the strikes and diminuendo, to fade out as the electronic ambient fades)

Perc. 2

6 times, poco a poco dim. a niente

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

olo Vc.

Vc. 1, 2

D.B.

Org./MIDI
As choral breath dies away, gradually fade to nothing by releasing one key at a time, from bottom to top, slowly, until all sound is gone.

Recommended: several seconds of silence at the end, as the music continues beyond our hearing.

9/29/19 Greenville, SC S.D.G.

Example 20. Dan Forrest, “epilogue: time is”, enigmatic ending.

Forrest's Take on Text Versus Music

There is no doubt that Forrest has composed and will certainly continue to compose beautiful melodic lines that will resound through the choral world for many years to come, but how does he balance the ever-present struggle of setting a text versus setting the music on which it is set? Which is more important to him? Where does he want to focal point to be? How does he arrive at the proper emphasis when composing a new work?

This can be summed up in a quote from a communication Forrest had with John Cornish, a fellow choral conductor and composer, on how he begins to compose what he has conceptualized. Forrest writes:

Every piece is a bit different. Sometimes I start with rhythm, but that can mean something speech-rhythm driven that then is molded to fit musical purposes, or it can mean something musical-rhythm driven that is molded to fit speech accent purposes. Other times it begins with pitch—a melodic shape may present itself and I work with it until it feels just right. Other times it may even be harmonically driven, although that's less common for me. Other times, the whole picture just gradually comes into focus, where there's a particular sound world or style that emerges, and the melody is just a part of that.⁶⁴

From this quote is it obvious that there is no set pattern that Forrest follows when composing new music. The great choral conductor and educator Robert Shaw addresses this dilemma in these words:

There are two elements to the musical setting of text. First there is what is called *prosody*: that is, the manner in which normal word accents and metrics are related to musical accents and metrics, how they match or contravene each other.

For instance, except for the ingenious extension of the opening syllable, observe how delightfully the opening notes of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!" adhere to the natural-inflection of the title word (even including the exclamation point). Or, think again how closely musical rhythm matches textual rhythm in "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

⁶⁴ Dan Forrest, Facebook communication with John Cornish, September 17, 2012.

The other aspect of music's relationship to text is less particular and detailed, but almost certainly more important. It has to do on the one hand with the meaning of text, with text as a value—its idea content, the whole realm of emotional, aesthetic and spiritual association which surround and interpenetrate it—and, on the other hand, with the similar significances of the music itself particularly as provided in its larger structure.⁶⁵

Throughout musical history, painting the text in the music has been a focus of many composers.

Word-painting was a prominent technique used in the madrigals of the Renaissance choral music. Other examples include Handel's use in *The Messiah*, to the popular contemporary pop music of Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah where the text "It goes like this the fourth, the fifth, the minor fall and the major lift, the baffled king composing hallelujah," signify the song's chord progression.⁶⁶

For those that sing and observe Forrest's choral music, there is no doubt that he seeks to shine forth the text predominantly as so many in history. As a composer, he strives not to use the text simply to accomplish musical purposes, but rather to effectively communicate the meaning of the text—whatever that may be—through the musical aspects of the composition.⁶⁷

Forrest states: "It can be difficult to paint both the meaning of individual words and yet paint the overall theme, mood, or affection of a text. I find myself varying between the two. At times I paint individual words, but sometimes I'll sacrifice the text-painting of an individual word for the sake of painting the bigger meaning of a phrase."⁶⁸

One such example was referenced back in Figure 18 where Forrest uses the rhythm and repeated phrases to paint the clock and its steady movement. Another example of text painting is

⁶⁵ Robert Shaw, *The Robert Shaw Reader*, Edited by Robert Blocker (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 108.

⁶⁶ Matthew Ellul, "How to Write Music," accessed December 15, 2022. https://www.wiki3.us.nina.az/Word_painting.html.

⁶⁷ Cornish, "A Conductor's Study," 87.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

the setting at the beginning and ending of “first breath last breath”. Forrest begins with audible breaths *sotto voce* (see Example 21), that paint the first breath of the newborn baby.

The image shows a musical score for four vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo). Above the Soprano staff, there is a marking: "Gentle but audible breaths (may not need whole choir)". The score consists of six measures. In each measure, there are two notes with a circled 'x' above them, connected by a slur. The notes are: Soprano (G4), Alto (F4), Tenor (E4), and Bass (D4) in the first measure; and Soprano (A4), Alto (G4), Tenor (F4), and Bass (E4) in the second measure. The remaining four measures contain rests for all parts.

Example 21. Dan Forrest, “first breath last breath”, word painting, mm.1-6.

To conclude this movement, the voices end with the text, “her last breath.” In addition to the text, there is no audible breathing by any performer – only silence (see Example 22). This is the complete opposite from the opening of the movement where audible breaths are heard. This symbolizes the death of the mother who ceases to breath and her last breath has gone out of her body and her physical life is gone.

166

S
breath, her last breath.

A
breath, her last breath,

T
breath, her last breath.

B
breath, her last breath.

Pno.
p ppp

(Final note may be omitted if electronic ambience is used)

Example 22. Dan Forrest, “first breath last breath”, lack of audible breathing, mm.167-174.

There are certainly more examples of Forrest’s word-painting throughout this piece, but these are just a few examples to show and emphasize that he is deliberate in how he sets texts to music.

Concluding Thought

After looking at the texts and the forms present in *the breath of life*, the next chapter will show how Forrest integrates texts with his compositional techniques used. Tying the lyrics with supportive musical compositional techniques will bring this work to life.

CHAPTER IV
 COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES FOUND IN FORREST'S
THE BREATH OF LIFE

Chapter IV will focus on the compositional techniques Forrest uses throughout *the breath of life* to give life and interest. There are multiple instances in some movements while others are specific and favorite moments of Forrest himself. These techniques include specific key relations, modulations and specific annunciations of the text for the listener's experience. Also included is his interjection of electronic timbres into the texture of the work to enhance the ethereal experience for the audience.

In many cultures, wind is regarded as the “breath of nature”, and frequently described in terms of human vocal expression such as sighing, moaning, howling and so on. As an invisible force of moving air, wind is largely experienced through its interaction with ourselves and the objects it encounters, becoming audible by moving through and activating these materials. Also, wind can be stirred up by moving objects and can scatter the sounds that it carries, hence its elusive character, at times playful, at other times relentless.⁶⁹

In *the breath of life*, the use of audible breathing by the singers represents this quote well. And since the sounds are created by human voices representing the beginning of human life, it clearly depicts the “breath of nature.” In an interview Forrest had with the Montclair State University ACDA Chapter, he discussed the importance of the first breath at the creation of life.”⁷⁰ “Breath is a metaphor for life” he says during the same interview.⁷¹ Another writer reminds us that,” How do we know that a human or an animal is alive? By whether or not there

⁶⁹Barry Truax, “Aeolian Voices,” accessed January 14, 2023, <https://www.sfu.ca/~truax/aeolian.html>.

⁷⁰ Forrest, Interview with Montclair State University ACDA.

⁷¹ Ibid.

is breath.”⁷² Forrest desires to have “people think about the beauty of breath and life. Beauty and joy in every breath, and pain in the last breath.”⁷³ Throughout this work, Forrest uses the Aeolian tone to help all who listen to have an emotional connection with the breath and its importance in life.

The Use of Aeolian Tone

In general, an Aeolian tone is produced when air passes over an obstacle...in music they are most often teeth, tongue and lips⁷⁴. As a compositional device that Forrest uses in the movements “et Deus inspiravit”, “first breath last breath”, and “epilogue: time is”, the aeolian tone is specific in achieving this breath-like quality. The tone that is produced can be manipulated in a variety of ways by slight modifications in the shaping of the lips and the use of the tongue behind closed teeth. The sound that is achieved with the lips shaped and the teeth apart is what should be desired at the opening of *the breath of life*. The conductor has the freedom to choose what he or she thinks a “first” breath would sound like. Forrest’s performance note in the score encourage experimentation to find the desired “sweeping” sound.

The text that Forrest uses to open the work references God breathing the first breath into mankind giving him life. This imagery is first captured in the opening bars where he gives written instructions saying, “Audible unison breath, misterioso; experiment with lip shape for best sound.”⁷⁵ This breath represents the beginning of life. It is also noted that he is specific with regard to the dynamic changes to accomplish this imagery. The work begins with a *pianissimo*

⁷² Debi Simons, “Dan Forrest Breathes Life into the breath of life,” accessed January 30, 2023, <https://www.debisimons.com/dan-forrest-breathes-life-into-the-breath-of-life/>.

⁷³ Forrest, Interview with Montclair State University ACDA.

⁷⁴ Collins Online Dictionary, “Aeolian Tone,” accessed November 3, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/aeolian-tone>.

⁷⁵ Dan Forrest, *the breath of life*, notes in printed score.

dynamic followed by a *crescendo* with an immediate *decrescendo*. This is the first sound the audience hears setting into motion the evolution of life and breath (see Example 23).

the breath of life

1. et Deus inspiravit... (and God breathed...)

and God breathed into him the breath of life; and man became a living soul

Audible unison breath, misterioso;
experiment with lip shape for best sound

Slowly evolving, freely ♩ = c. 69-72

Soprano
Alto

Tenor
Bass

Piano

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Solo Cello

Cello 1, 2

Double Bass

Organ/
MIDI

pp

pp

Distant faint windchime
shimmer, here and there

pp

Slowly evolving, freely ♩ = c. 69-72

minimal vibrato, sempre molto legato

mp

p

p

minimal vibrato, sempre molto legato

mp (patch is not touch-sensitive; dynamics
are for balancing overall levels)

(hold down keys for full duration shown;
ambience will gradually fade after release)

Example 23. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, audible breaths with electronics and strings, mm. 1-8.

Measures one through twenty-eight are a growing introduction of sound which precedes the first entrance of any text (see Example 24). This section continues to build in layers while also continuing to use aeolian tones with dynamic swells to give the imagery of not just one initial breath but that the breath of man is continuing life.

Measure 1	breathing only
Measures 2-4	breathing with added electronic ambience
Measures 5-12	low strings only
Measures 13-20	low strings, viola, TB breathing
Measures 21-28	all strings, piano, tenor/bass breathing, soprano/alto pitched Oos

Example 24. Dan Forrest, “et inspiravit Deus”, building of layers of sound, mm.1-28.

To give even greater clarity in helping the conductor know what is desired by the composer, Forrest writes, “Oos may be sung with breathy/mysterious vocal tone, emerging from the TB breathy wind “sweeps” and disappearing back into them in each 4-bar phrase.”⁷⁶

Forrest is seeking to not only use the breath timbre as life, but also as an artistic gesture.

Lynda Austin writes how every breath you take is different, how it changes you, and how it affects each life.

Breath. “The breath of life.” You all say it; and you do not understand what you are saying. Each time you draw in a breath, you create. Each time you breathe out, you present a creation to the world, to the Universe. Each time you breathe in, you take oxygen to your lungs, your bloodstream, your cells — and you become a different human being. You are changed with each breath. Each time you breathe out, you are a different human being than you were when you breathed in. This is LIFE: Experience comes in, experience goes out, and you are changed. Breath is not good or bad, it IS. Life is not good or bad, it IS. Experience is not good or bad, it IS.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Lynda Austin, “Breath As a Metaphor for Life.” Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://www.vincegowmon.com/breath-as-a-metaphor-for-life/>

This thought is also evident in how Forrest treats this opening section. Every breath is important, has meaning, and is unique. A conductor feels this breath and the importance of it in every single line of music in their preparation and delivery. A singer feels this breath as not only a sustaining part of vocal production, but also as the emotion to help create tension and release of the line. Both conductor and singer are somewhat responsible to help the listener feel this same emotion as each line swells with the natural pressure of the breath to create the imagery desired by Forrest's writing.

Forrest's use of this audible breath is even more poignant in the second movement, "first breath last breath". As the title denotes, as well as the poetry used, this movement begins with the imagery of the first breath of a newborn babe (see Figure 25) and ends with the lack of any human breaths to represent the ending of life (see Figure 26).

Andante, semplice e molto rubato ♩ = c. 66-76
Gentle but audible breaths (may not need whole choir)

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Example 25. Dan Forrest, "first breath last breath", audible breathing, mm.1-6.

As with the opening of "et Deus inspiravit", this movement also adds to the imagery with electronic ambience but this time it includes the upper strings playing harmonics. This gives an eerie quality to the beginning of this movement.

2. first breath last breath

Andante, semplice e molto rubato ♩ = c. 66-76
Gentle but audible breaths (may not need whole choir)

Soprano *pp* *p*

Alto *pp* *p*

Tenor *pp* *p*

Bass *pp* *p*

Piano *p* *molto espressivo*

Percussion TACET Movement 2

Andante, semplice e molto rubato ♩ = c. 66-76

Violin I *pp*

Violin II *pp*

Viola *pp*

Solo Cello

Cello 1, 2

Double Bass

MIDI Keyboard *mp*

MIDI (if a smaller controller/keyboard is used, omit top octave doublings)

Example 26. Dan Forrest, “first breath last breath”, audible breathing with electronics and harmonics, mm.1-8.

It has been said of the composer, Gustav Mahler, that he “never tired of experimenting with orchestral colors and techniques. He called for traditional instruments to use new techniques; he combined instruments in unusual and effective ways, and he brought out qualities in instruments that nobody had ever imagined!”⁷⁸ He said of the opening of his first symphony, it “sounded far too substantial for the shimmering and glimmering of the air that I had in mind.” So, he changed the instrumentation to the whispery sound of string harmonics.⁷⁹ This “whispery sound” that Mahler desired, or Britten’s “magical false harmonics—airy, flute-like notes”⁸⁰ in the coda of his Violin Concerto, both represent the ethereal feeling of *misterioso* that Forrest marks in his score. Forrest even goes a step further in suggesting that this effect could be accomplished by a smaller number of singers out of the chorus. The desire to give both the listener and the performer this experience is accomplished by this compositional technique that Forrest employs in three of the movements of *the breath of life*.

The Use of Electronic Ambience

In order to achieve a more ethereal soundscape, Forrest has created MIDI patches that can be played during the live performance. A MIDI patch is a preset sound in a sound-generator (synthesizer). This part can be played by the organist or another keyboard player on an electronic keyboard that is connected to a computer with Logic software. The “breath of life” patch is available for free at the composer’s website. This keyboard should be connected to an amplifier/speaker setup or be able to connect into the house P/A system.⁸¹

⁷⁸ San Francisco Symphony, “A World of Experience, Gustav Mahler.” Accessed February 5, 2023. <https://www.keepingcore.org/interactive/gustav-mahler/playing-blocks/soundscapes>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Houston Symphony. Program notes for *A Tale of Love and War: Britten's Violin Concerto*, <https://houstonsymphony.org/britten-violin-concerto>, accessed January 16, 2018.

⁸¹ Forrest, *the breath of life*, notes in printed score.

Forrest's goal with the electronic ambience is to explore different timbres of electronic sound that will begin to "break down barriers of expected live performance sounds."⁸²

To close "first breath last breath", Forrest also uses the electronic ambience of the MIDI patch, the strings playing harmonics, but this time there is no audible vocal breathing. The symbolization is that when breath stops, death has arrived. This descriptively mirrors the text that ends with "her last breath" (see Example 27).

⁸² Ibid.

166

p *rit.* *rit.*

S
breath, her last breath.

A
breath, her last breath,

T
breath, her last breath.

B
breath, her last breath.

Pno. *p* *ppp* (Final note may be omitted if electronic ambience is used)

Vln. I *rit.* *rit.* (remove mutes)

Vln. II (remove mutes)

Vla. (remove mutes)

Solo Vc. (remove mutes)

Vc. 1, 2 (remove mutes)

D.B.

MIDI *p* Keep pedal/keys down; do not release until downbeat of next movement, so the sound gradually fades at that point.

Example 27. Dan Forrest, “first breath last breath”, no audible breathing with electronics and harmonics, mm.171-174.

Twice during this movement, in measures twenty-eight and eighty, there is a simple audible breath that happens in between each stanza of text to help portray the continuation of life as it progresses from childhood to adulthood. Forrest’s use of the aeolian tone, the harmonics in

the upper strings, and the electronic ambience all support the text in portraying a life from the beginning to the end of the second movement, “first breath last breath”.

The only other use of the Aeolian tone is at the end of the entire work. In “epilogue: time is”, the final movement in *the breath of life*, Forrest writes audible breaths for all eight parts that are also notated with a crescendo/decrescendo pattern that has been present in each instance of this technique. One last final breath that comes with the end of life (see Example 28).

104 6 times, poco a poco dim. a niente Audible breath (may not need whole choir)

S1 1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

S2 1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

A1 1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

A2 1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

T1 1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

T2

B1

B2

Example 28. Dan Forrest, “epilogue: time is”, closing audible breathing, mm.104-109.

Other Favorite Compositional Effects

In the interview referenced multiple times throughout this document, Forrest spoke with the ACDA Chapter at Montclair State University to discuss many different aspects of *the breath of life*. A portion of his interview discussed favorite moments of his in *the breath of life*.

Key Relations and Modulations

There is a common tonal note that is present throughout all movements of this piece. This is the note, Ab (see Table 2). Not only is there a common chord tone, but each key is closely related in some way. Noticing the “key” column, it is clear just how close the relations are for each movement.

Table 2. Dan Forrest, *the breath of life*, key relationships with common note Ab

Movement	Key	Key Relation
“et Deus inspiravit”	Key of Db Major	dominant chord tone
“first breath last breath”	Key of Ab Major	tonic chord tone
“the silent kiss”	Key of f minor	mediant chord tone
“epilogue: time is”	Key of g# minor	tonic chord tone

Modulating to a closely related key can create a sense of continuity and cohesiveness in a piece of music, while still maintaining some musical variety. It is a useful technique for composers and can help to create a dynamic and expressive musical narrative.⁸³ Forrest certainly desires to keep this sense of continuity and cohesiveness while creating great variety between movements. This also helps to keep the musical narrative moving from the beginning of the piece to the end (see Example 29).

Db Major modulates to its **dominant key** of Ab Major.

Ab Major then modulates to its **relative key** of f minor.

F minor then modulates back to Ab, but to the **parallel enharmonic minor** of g# minor.

Example 29. Dan Forrest, *the breath of life*, modulations between movements.

⁸³ Mickey Hansen, “2.3 Key Relationships: Parallel, Closely Related, and Distantly Related Keys,” accessed January 1, 2023, <https://library.fiveable.me/ap-music-theory/unit-2/key-relationships-parallel-closely-related-distantly-related-keys/study-guide/O9y504HtZ3u43Vct8dwm>.

Forrest also describes a favorite modulation of his that occurs in the second movement, “first breath last breath”. He modulates into an interlude from the text in measure sixty-six “the mother breathes it” to the text in measure seventy-nine “And when the mother dies.” The entire interlude is composed in Bb Major only to modulate back to Ab Major. This interlude in Bb Major really accentuates Forrest earlier comments from the interview that he wants people to find “beauty and joy in every breath.”⁸⁴ The unique entrance of the voices in Bb minor (see Example 30) immediately after going back to Ab really sets the mood that something has changed. This chord in Bb minor mimics the rest of his statement that people will find “pain in the last breath.”⁸⁵ The twelve-measure interlude in the key of Bb Major might represent the life that exists between the first breath and the final breath. After the interlude, the tonality falls back into the minor to represent the coming death.

82 D Slower
p
 S And when the Moth - er dies, her mid-dle-aged son
 A *p*
 (Aw) And when the Moth - er dies, her son, her son
 T *p*
 (Aw) her son, her son
 B *p*
 her son, her son
 Pno.

Example 30. Dan Forrest, “first breath last breath”, Bb minor chord in voices in Ab Major, m. 83.

⁸⁴ Forrest, Interview with Montclair State University ACDA.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Favorite Musical Moments of Forrest

In the third movement, “the silent kiss”, Forrest uses the specific interval of a second throughout whenever the word “kiss” appears (see Example 31). This musical interval is present as both major and minor intervals and is shared among the voices and the orchestra. He depicts the imagery of the closeness of a kiss by using this interval which gives a strong dramatic musical impact to the text.

The image shows a musical score for the opera "The Silent Kiss" by Dan Forrest. It features four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and Piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "si - lent kiss. Oo. Oo, the si - lent kiss, Oo." The score highlights specific intervals: a minor second between the Soprano and Alto parts in measure 26, and a major second between the Alto and Tenor parts in measure 27.

Example 31. Dan Forrest, “the silent kiss”, example of minor second on “kiss”, between second tenor and alto, m. 26 and major second between alto and tenor, m. 27.

Two other interesting moments that Forrest mentions occur in the last movement, “epilogue: time is”. When the last text is sung, “Time is not” in measure ninety-two to ninety - four, he remarks that the music does not end when time ends. He says in the interview that “life

isn't gone when you die...your story lives on."⁸⁶ This story will continue on in your family, colleagues, friends and even strangers who hear of it. It can continue to have an impact on the living for a time to come.

The second interesting moment of *the breath of life* is how Forrest writes the ending measures. Much with the same thought in mind of the music continuing after the text, Forrest puts no final barline at the conclusion of the piece (see Example 32). The last measure of the entire piece is left open-ended. Forrest says that this is a depiction that "sound and life continue."⁸⁷ Sound doesn't cease at the barline, just like the impact of life doesn't end with the absence of breath.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

epilogue: time is | Score 109

104 **6 times, poco a poco dim. a niente** Audible breath (may not need whole choir)

S1
S2
A1
A2
T1
T2
B1
B2

Pno.

Perc. 1
Perc. 2

Vin. I
Vin. II
Vla.
Solo Vc.
Vc. 1, 2
D.B.

Org./MIDI

1-2. All Oo
3-4. Seconds Mm, Firsts Oo
5-6. All Mm

p

Recommended: several seconds of silence at the end, as the music continues beyond our hearing.

Final time, keep pedal down to the end

gradually fade out at the same rate as electronic ambience

(Strike a different random triangle on beat 1, each repeat)

(Continue poco a poco dim. a niente)

(Strike a different random triangle, one at a time, every few seconds; gradually slow down the strikes and diminuendo, to fade out as the electronic ambience fades)

As choral breath dies away, gradually fade to nothing by releasing one key at a time, from bottom to top, slowly, until all sound is gone.

9/29/19 Greenville, SC
S.D.G.

Example 32. Dan Forrest, “epilogue: time is”, open measure to end the piece, m. 109.

Final Thoughts on Compositional Techniques

It is evident that *the breath of life* is full of compositional devices that Forrest employs rather well. Some are obvious and others are not. His use of the timbre of the human breath certainly interjects life into certain movements. The use of the close interval of a second to give musical imagery to the word kiss is not as obvious until one studies the score and notices.

Including the use of the MIDI patches to create electronic ambience, all of these techniques truly help in giving an ethereal feeling to all who are listening.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND REHEARSAL AND
PERFORMANCE THOUGHTS FOR FORREST'S
THE BREATH OF LIFE

In the music world, there is no denying that a special bond exists between the composer and his creative work. In choral music, the bond might be a bit stronger because of the extra layer of expression that comes from the text. How then is the creativity of the composer transferred to the audience? It passes from the conductor to the musicians to the audience members. In the introduction to their book, *The Choral Experience*, a choral resource book, Ray Robinson and Allen Winold write that at the heart of choral singing is “an unusual experience of communication between a composer and a singer, in which the singer is able to perceive the universe in a new perspective—through the eyes of the composer.”⁸⁸ They go on to say that “this extraordinary act is accomplished through an empathic relationship between the singer and the conductor which allows both, at least for the moment, to participate with the composer in the creative act.”⁸⁹

It only makes sense that the singer, the conductor, and the composer all come together with a common goal – to make music. In this process there is a common denominator – the printed score. The composer has put their ideas down on paper and now it is the responsibility and challenge of the conductor to lead the other musicians in making this work come alive. A

⁸⁸ Ray Robinson and Allen Winold, *The Choral Experience: Literature, Materials, and Methods* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc., 1992). 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

reminder from the conductor Erich Leinsdorf that “the score is not the music.”⁹⁰ The challenge that lies before the conductor is a monumental one but is full of great reward for all those involved. One of the choral giants, Robert Shaw put it this way, “The message is in *the music*—in the nitty-gritty-mini-matters of good intonation, good rhythm, good speech, good color and good dynamics.”⁹¹ All of the specifics Shaw gives are important for the conductor as interpreter of any music. John Cornish said about the music of Dan Forrest, “Some of these perspectives are clearly seen and heard in the music, while others have a more subtle impact upon the performer and listener.”⁹²

Even though a composer, such as Forrest, has given many details in the printed score to be followed by the conductor to help the musicians understand what he is saying, there is still great responsibility for the conductor to study and express their musical interpretation. This final chapter will focus on the approach a conductor needs to have when working with the printed score and what considerations they should have in reproducing what the composer’s intent could be.

The great Leonard Bernstein once said, “Technique is communication: the two words are synonymous in conductors.” In order to best achieve this communication, the conductor must use the best techniques in all areas of music. There are three areas to explore here: score study preparation, rehearsal challenges for singers ranging from pitch to diction, and conducting challenges for the conductor relating to singers and instrumentalists.

⁹⁰ Erich Leinsdorf, *The Composer’s Advocate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), viii.

⁹¹ Shaw, *The Robert Shaw Reader*, 52.

⁹² Cornish, “A Conductor’s Study.”

General Observations on Score Study Preparation

Having a well-prepared score before you step onto the podium will provide better opportunities to design engaging, brain-friendly, and productive rehearsals.⁹³

Understanding the score helps us determine appropriate rehearsal pacing and triage.⁹⁴

The Royal Northern College of Music says, “Score study and music analysis play a very important role in the work of the conductor. The score is the composer’s means for communication with the performers. Through deciphering the score, the conductor becomes familiar with the musical language and ideas of the composer and is able to bring the work to life for the audience.”⁹⁵ The great Robert Shaw, a giant in the choral field said of score study, “I am frightened to death not only by concerts – but by rehearsals – the fear that I will not find the answers to what score study, my ears and my heart tell me should happen.”⁹⁶ It is quite plain to see how important some conductors felt about the ability and need to score study. The need to analyze, seek to understand and interpret musical scores is of utmost importance. Quoting Helmuth Rilling, “If you want to be a good conductor, score preparation will require much work ahead of time—much solitary work.”⁹⁷ The more prepared the conductor becomes before the first rehearsal, the better the final result will be.

This most important step of score study is often overlooked by conductors due to a myriad of things including a lack of time, a lack of knowledge and sometime even a complacent “lazy” approach by a seasoned conductor. Kenneth Kiesler, the founder and director of The

⁹³ Sharon J. Paul, *Art & Science in the Choral Rehearsal* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020), 169.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ “Score Study, Preparation, and Background,” Royal Northern College of Music, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://conductit.eu/study-room/score-study-preparation-background/>.

⁹⁶ Robert Shaw, “Preparation and Rehearsal,” Robert Shaw website, accessed February 17, 2023. <http://robertshaw.website/preparation-rehearsal>.

⁹⁷ Joan C. Conlon et al., *Wisdom, Wit, and Will: Women Choral Conductors on Their Art* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2009), 13.

Conductor's Retreat at Meadowmak, says that "Score study is the conductor's privilege and responsibility. It's a life-long task, and the process can be expected to mature with experience. Score study is not clinical, academic work; rather, it is a pathway to understanding the creative impulses of the human spirit."⁹⁸ This quote by Kiesler seems to encapsulate what other conductors and composers have said. Yes, there certainly is work involved in score study, but it is the goal of understanding what the composer is desiring or envisioning notated by what they have written on the page. The conductor is the "go-between" from composer to performer with the intended goal of presenting what they feel and believe the composer's intent was in composing any given piece of music. Proper and adequate score study will greatly increase the success of said goal. As the conductor, Erich Leinsdorf said, "the prerequisite to conducting any work well is an intimate knowledge of the score."⁹⁹

The next facet of score study is the ability of the conductor to take what the composer has written in the score and then merge it with their own musical interpretation. To many a conductor, this is the greater joy. It is the opportunity to put their own "spin" on musicianship and interpretation and then seek to instill this over-arching goal to all performers involved in the piece so that it can then be transmitted to an audience. The performance is the culmination of all the work and thought put into the piece by the conductor from the first imaginative thoughts of how they see the written notes on the page to the expressive playing and singing by the performers. One last thought on score study:

Know the score, and make careful plans, but try to avoid becoming rigid about interpretation. Leave some music-making for the rehearsals, for you will find that you

⁹⁸ Kenneth Kiesler, "Conducting and Score Study," accessed March 15, 2023, <https://conductorsretreat.org/faculty/kennethkiesler/>.

⁹⁹ Leinsdorf, *The Composer's Advocate*, 4.

learn as much from good players as they do from you. Just be sure you *never* wait to learn the music in rehearsal!¹⁰⁰

Score Study Observations in *the breath of life*

There are a number of things every conductor can and probably should do when coming into a relationship with a new work. This author did a number of analyses and readings of *the breath of life* to help in his understanding.

Singing of Each Individual Part

The first thing that was done by this author was the singing of every voice part followed by the playing on the piano and partially singing of each orchestra part. This is a vital beginning in gaining an understanding of the melodic and some harmonic aspects of the piece. As each part was sight read, many musical characteristics were noticed and sought to be correlated into each reading. Singing correct notes and rhythms while noticing dynamics and specific articulations were the main focus. Dr. James Neilson and Dr. Karl M. Holvik on the website banddirector.com say, “Why begin the preliminary study of the score by singing its melodies? The answer is so simple. Melody gives face form to music, depth and perspective to its structure, intelligent meaning to its rhythms, and plausibility to its emotional message.”¹⁰¹ As each part is sung, the conductor finds not only the beautiful melodies that Forrest has created but also the creative harmonic progressions that give variety and vibrancy are found. Expected and unexpected key relations and modulations were also noticed. In addition, the presence of difficult intervals in vocal parts, or challenging rhythmic patterns in the instrumentals will be found. Any challenges found that faced the conductor would most likely be a challenge for most if not all the

¹⁰⁰ Don V. Moses et al., *Face to Face with Orchestra and Chorus* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 33.

¹⁰¹ James Neilson, and Karl M. Holvik, “Studying the Full Score, Part 1,” accessed March 6, 2023, <https://banddirector.com/conducting/studying-the-full-score-part-1/>.

other musicians that work on this piece. It is this understanding and guidance that is expected by the conductor in the rehearsals. Some vocal challenges including pitch and diction will be addressed later in this chapter.

Harmonic Analysis of Each Movement

An overview of the larger harmonic structure was done with more specific attention given to the acappella portions in the second movement, “first breath last breath”. The main goal of these analyses was to notice the progressions of the *chaconne* and the *passacaglia* that Forrest uses in specific movements that were discussed in Chapter Three of this document. This harmonic analysis was also instrumental in giving a harmonic backbone to the sight-singing that was done prior to this.

Phrases and Breath Marks

Another vital part to understanding *the breath of life* is to see the small phrases that make up the larger picture. This is most commonly found in the vocal lines that Forrest often gives insight by noting breath marks and carry overs. Other instances for a clear breath is the presence of a rest in the melodic line. If not marked, it can be safe to note that breaths shouldn't be taken in the middle of hyphenated words or melismatic passages.

Reading Aloud the Texts

Knowing how carefully and specific Forrest is in his choice and use of texts, the author took time to read out loud each text in every movement. This is easily done poetically as it is included in the beginning pages of the full score as well as in the piano/vocal score. The author found that a better flow and understanding of the text is accomplished through reading. It allows the reader to observe all punctuation marks or lack of them, and even the arrangement of the poetic lines themselves sometimes help give a greater understanding. Knowing from Forrest's

discussion on his use of texts in chapter three and the importance of them, the author found there was a greater bond with the text after reading it aloud.

As each step of score study was layered upon each other, the author noticed how each part was intricately joined together and without the individual work, it would have more difficult to put it all together and certainly individual nuances would have been missed.

Pitch and Diction Challenges for Singers

Two challenges that face the conductor when working with singers are pitch and diction. The first challenge to discuss in *the breath of life* is pitch. In music terminology, the “sing in tune” synonym is “sing on pitch.” Conductors have probably used one or both of these terms in talking with singers about ensemble singing while working with them to blend with other singers. Both these terms mean that the singer is hitting the correct notes. There are moments when Forrest has all voices singing in unison and then in octaves (see Example 33).

35

S.
A.

ra - vit

T.
B.

Pno.

Example 33. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, vocal octaves, mm. 35-36.

Often times, unison singing is difficult to tune especially when spaced over multiple octaves.

There are numerous ways one can work on singing in tune as an ensemble. Focusing on

uniformly formed vowels will help in successful tuning of unison singing. Another way to work on tuning is finding the proper balance of air versus pressure that is used to provide a pitch. Too much air or pressure will often cause the pitch to be sharp. Other ways to combat pitch issues are focusing on the pitch placement within the vocal mechanism and singing within each one's vocal range.

Also with regard to pitch are the moments of high tessitura for vocal parts, especially the sopranos (see Example 34). Forrest is not afraid to use pitches on the upper range of the sopranos to add vocal color, but it can often lead to tuning problems.

149

S. Solo
a - ni - mam vi - ven -

S. A.
a - ni - mam vi - ven - tem,

T. B.

Example 34. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, high soprano tessitura pitch issues, mm. 149-152.

Another issue of pitch is the leap into a dissonance that Forrest uses. Often this leap moves into a major or minor second with another voice part (see Figure 35).

72

3. the silent kiss | Score

17 **A** SOPRANOS *(stirs on vocalization mm. 17-33 show phrasing; breathing may be staggered or follow the stirs; "oo" vocal should be very tall, almost "oh")* **pp** *sempre molto legato*

S Oo _____ Oo

ALTOS **pp** *sempre molto legato*

A Oo _____ Oo, the si - lent kiss, Oo

TENORS **pp** *sempre molto legato*

T Oo _____ the si - lent kiss, Oo, the si - lent kiss,

Oo _____

BASSES *sempre molto legato* **pp**

B Oo _____

Example 35. Dan Forrest, “the silent kiss”, soprano leap into dissonance, mm. 21-22.

This can be challenging for the voice part doing the leaping especially. Not only is the leap of a major seventh challenging, but it is compounded by being in dissonance with the alto and tenor sections. The common tendency is to overshoot the interval into a perfect octave with the other voices and then to slide down into the dissonance. A keen ear, and much work will be needed to keep the pitch clean and precise in that instance. Forrest also uses the dissonance of a second, both major and minor, frequently throughout voices and instruments in the third movement, “the silent kiss”.

Another potential challenge is the lengthy moments of a cappella singing. This is most noticeable in the second movement, “first breath last breath” where there are extensive a cappella sections. Because of the length of the a cappella passages, examples are not included but can be found in “first breath last breath”, in the chart included in Table 2.). If the breath support is not properly maintained and the pitch dips, the change in pitch will be glaring when the orchestra re-enters.

The second challenge a conductor involved in any choral music will face is that of diction. That is just as true for *the breath of life*. Forrest uses both Latin and English texts along

with many different instances from humming to oohing. In the article, “An Overview of Vowels (and Consonents [*sic*]) for the Singer, and for the Choir: A Practical Primer” written by Stuart Hunt for the American Choral Directors Association’s ChoralNet newsletter, he says, “As conductors and artists, it is incumbent upon us to help young or learning performers and students to communicate text, with clarity and expression.”¹⁰² He then lists six issues of choral singing that must be unified – pitch, rhythm, phrasing, dynamics, vowels and consonants.¹⁰³ These are issues that all choral conductors face with singers of all levels. To accomplish clarity in these issues, the conductor will need to have studied the score in great detail. The conductor should analyze and understand harmonically what the composer has done. This knowledge will influence other decisions made with regard to musical interpretation and phrasing. They should also note difficult places of tuning, articulation and rhythm that might cause trouble. Often, specific dynamics and articulations might affect the pitch. For instance, an accented attack or a *fortissimo* or *pianissimo* entrance if not prepared in breath support will often be out of tune. Score study, as previously written about earlier in this chapter, is vital to the conductor’s understanding of the music and effective rehearsal preparation. This detailed study must occur before the first rehearsal. At the first rehearsal, all involved must use a keen ear with focused listening.

From an interview Forrest did in 2012, it is obvious that both pitch and diction are important to him as a composer. He stated:

My favorite texts are ones that combine beautiful ideas with beautiful sounds. Some poetry expresses beautiful ideas, but the sound of the words contradicts the meaning of the words — like a lullaby full of explosive and percussive consonants. My favorite texts are the ones that express beautiful ideas, and reinforce those ideas with sounds that

¹⁰² Stuart Hunt, “An Overview of Vowels (and Consonents [*sic*]) for the Singer, and for the Choir: A Practical Primer.” *ACDA ChoralNet Newsletter*, January 29, 2020. <https://choralnet.org/archives/612789>

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

heighten the impact of those ideas. Sometimes I'll change a word of a text, not because it means the wrong thing propositionally, but because it implies the wrong things sonically, or just doesn't "sound right." When the meaning and sounds of words align, setting them to music is easy.¹⁰⁴

When Forrest sets his text to music, he views the text as part of the musical whole. How a word *sounds* is as important to him as what a word *means*.¹⁰⁵

Table 3 has been created as a guide to issues relating to pitch and diction for singers in *the breath of life*. Though it is not exhaustive, it has been created to draw attention to specific problematic issues that might arise within the ensemble rehearsal. Many of these issues are present in other places in this piece and results can be easily transferred to those moments.

¹⁰⁴ Lyons, "Choral Conversations: Dan Forrest."

¹⁰⁵ Cornish, "A Conductor's Study."

Table 3. Pitch and diction challenges for singers in *the breath of life*

Measures	Pitch or Diction	Description	Possible Solution
Mvt I, 1-3	Audible unison breath	Experiencing with the singer's lip shape for best sound	Practice different vowel shapes (closed to open)
Mvt I, 29-32, 37-44, etc.	Diction	The emphasis of separated final t of "Et" and initial d in "Deus"	Use a glottal attack to separate consonants
Mvt I, 31 and following	Diction	The vowel in "Deus" – being careful of the diphthong and not eliding into a "Yuh" sound	Experiment with a glottal attack to separate vowels
Mvt I, 35	Pitch	Tuning unison octaves in all voice parts	Lighter breath pressure in voice to help tune
Mvt I, 39-52	Pitch	Major 2 nd dissonance between soprano/alto/bass	Focus on interval training and keeping pitch dissonant
Mvt I, 59-60	Diction	The vowel in "eius" – being careful of the diphthong	Experiment with a glottal attack to separate vowels
Mvt I, 69, 71, 83	Pitch	Leap by soprano into a Major 2 nd dissonance with alto	Work with step movement into dissonance then work the leap
Mvt I, 72	Pitch	Leap by soprano into a Major 2 nd dissonance with tenor	Same as above
Mvt I, 77-84	Diction	Conductor must decide exactly which type of "ah" sound to use – a brighter [a] or a darker [ɑ] sound	Experiment with what sets the ambient sound wanted
Mvt I, 81	Pitch	Major 2 nd dissonance between tenor/bass	Focus on interval training and keeping pitch dissonant
Mvt I, 97	Pitch	Major 2 nd dissonance between soprano/alto and tenor/bass	Focus on interval training and keeping pitch dissonant

Table 3 Continued

Measures	Pitch or Diction	Description	Possible Solution
Mvt I, 107 – 110	Diction	Shape of mouth for desired projection of “mm”	Lips closed, teeth apart, high soft palette, lots of resonance
Mvt I, 145-160	Pitch	Vowels to help the sopranos and soloist with the high tessitura	Work on vocal placement with relaxed throat
Mvt I, 166	Pitch	Major 2 nd dissonance on alto entrance	Focus on interval training and keeping pitch dissonant
Mvt II, 12-22	Pitch/Diction	Tall and round “oo” in alto/tenor/bass to help achieve “expressiveness” and higher pitch	Keep on top of the pitch with raised soft palette
Mvt II, 12-26	Pitch	A cappella section that could fall flat in pitch leading to awkward instrument entrance in m.26	Singing on top of the pitch; listening to balance; keep energy
Mvt II, 12-26	Diction (multiple consonants and vowels)	Clear and distinct articulation to ensure comprehension of text while a cappella	Focus on diction and expression of text
Mvt II, 32-66	Pitch	A cappella section then tuning with solo cello	Listening for balance and pitch
Mvt II, 32-66	Diction (multiple consonants and vowels)	Clear and distinct articulation to ensure comprehension of text while a cappella	Focus on diction and expression of text
Mvt II, 83-126	Diction (multiple consonants and vowels)	Clear and distinct articulation to ensure comprehension of text while a cappella	Focus on diction and expression of text
Mvt II, 130-146	Diction	Keeping tall “ah” shape for all voices during long melismatic sections	Keep mouth open with relaxed jaw

Table 3 Continued

Measures	Pitch or Diction	Description	Possible Solution
Mvt II, 130-146	Pitch	Major and minor 2nds between voice parts often during suspension figures	Sing through the suspension of dissonance before resolution
Mvt II, 167-170	Pitch	The gradual elimination of non-chord tones leading to unison last note	Listening as the chord becomes simpler until only unison tone remains
Mvt III, 17-18	Pitch	Major 7 th leap in soprano	Work with step movement into dissonance then work the leap
Mvt III (all)	Pitch	Use of both minor and major 2nds on the word “kiss” requires precise pitch for tuning and resolution	Focus on interval training and keeping pitch dissonant
Mvt III, 17-38	Diction	Mouth and lip shape to achieve desired “oo” projection in all voices	Keep on top of the pitch with raised soft palette
Mvt III (all)	Plosive consonants on “I celebrate the silent kiss”	[t], [k], and [b] are plosive consonants found in this phrase throughout the movement. They must be clearly and somewhat explosively enunciated.	Focus on diction and expression of text
Mvt III, 91-115	Pitch/Diction	Keeping tall “ah” shape for soprano/tenor during long melismatic section	Keep mouth open with relaxed jaw
Mvt IV, 8-9	Pitch	Tuning unison D# between alto2/tenor1 and the open 5 th	Tuning the P5 can be tricky – listen carefully
Mvt IV (all)	Plosive consonant in “time”	[t] is a plosive consonant that is present often	Focus on the present consonant “t”
Mvt IV (all)	“time is”	Decision of elision or glottal separation in between the words “time..is”	Try both options and decide on which conductor prefers

Table 3 Continued

Measures	Pitch or Diction	Description	Possible Solution
Mvt IV, 76-79	Diction	Tall “ah” in the word “not” especially in soprano high tessitura	Keep mouth open with relaxed jaw
Mvt IV, 104-105	Diction	Making sure vowels match together for all voices to aid in the diminuendo	Keep mouth positions alike to achieve unison sound in diminuendo

Challenges for the Conductor

In an article entitled, “Behind the Scenes: The Difference Between Choral and Orchestral Conducting,” Lawrence Ekerling, the Music Director for the Evanston Symphony Orchestra, writes about some of the difficulties facing a conductor. He includes different timings, articulating gestures, and even the conductor’s personality as things to work to be aware of and change in necessary. He then closes the article with the following statement:

The single most important element in a musical performance that holds everything together is...(not the conductor!!!) but each performer’s ability to listen! And through listening, they sing and play as an ensemble. And if a conductor can get his/her forces to listen to each other, it can be the most glorious and rewarding of performances.¹⁰⁶

Listening! Listening! It is not just the ability of the conductor to listen to each section of the orchestra along with the choral voices to work on balance and ensemble.

In *the breath of life* there are many opportunities for each musician to take notice of the six elements mentioned above. The conductor should encourage the musicians to listen for balance as well. Where is the melody? Can they hear it? Is their dynamic level too much or too little? The rhythm is important in helping to keep the tempo steady. It is even more important where multiple rhythms are intertwined as at rehearsal G in “et Deus inspiravit”.

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence Ekerling, “Behind the Scenes: The Difference Between Choral and Orchestral Conducting,” accessed February 12, 2023, <https://evanstonSymphony.org/content/behind-scenes-difference-between-choral-and-orchestral-conducting>,.

The timbre of the sound, both instrumental and vocal, are vital to the overall presentation of each movement. From the audible breaths in the voices to the harmonics in the strings, to the *fortissimo* and the *pianissimo* moments, all details are important for the ensemble as a whole but must be orchestrated by the conductor. Each musician can take ownership of their own intonation and pitch to be sure it blends well into the whole sound. But even then, the conductor must be listening to the overall sound. There is even the ability for the musicians to understand the form of the work so they can see the overall picture. How does each movement contribute to the grand scheme of the overall work.

An effective and rewarding performance can be had by all performers if careful and attentive listening is employed. This is important so that all begin to work in harmony as one complete unit. Thoroughness in preparation will result in success in the experience that draws the audience into the overall musical performance. This brings the largest reward for the conductor and musicians while providing the best musical experience for the audience.

Balancing the Sound

In *the breath of life*, one challenge that will face to conductor is the matter of balance. Some decisions will need to be made prior to the rehearsal as to which lines need to be most prominent in certain sections. But the bulk of these balance decisions will be made when putting the orchestra and chorus together in rehearsal. Numbers are important. More instruments mean the need for greater attention to balance. There may arise the need to have a smaller number of players play to ensure that the chorus and their text is able to be heard and understood. This could be an issue in certain soft moments but seems to need most often to be addressed in the large, loud climactic moments when all instruments and singers are together (see Example 36).

40 1. et Deus inspiravit | Score

145 **Plu mosso** $\text{♩} = c. 102$
f SOPRANO SOLO

S. Solo
 et fac - tus est in

S. A.
 Et fac - tus, et fac - tus est,

T. B.
 fac - tus, et

Pno.
ff

Perc. 1
 Kick Drum
f

Perc. 2
 Timpani
f

Vln. I
ff legato

Vln. II
ff legato

Vla.
ff legato

Solo Vc.
ff legato

Vc. 1, 2
ff legato

D.B.
ff legato

Org./MIDI
f

Example 36. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit,” balance issue between voices and orchestra.

Another balance issue that could be of concern is the soprano/alto pitched vowels versus the tenor/bass audible “sweeping” breaths (see Example 37).

Oos may be sung with breathy/mysterious vocal tone, emerging from the TB breath/wind "sweeps" and disappearing back into them in each 4 bar phrase

A *Adagio misterioso* ♩ = c. 72

p

(Oo)

p

Example 37. Dan Forrest, “et Deus inspiravit”, balance issue between pitches and audible breaths.

In the score, Forrest gives the detailed instructions for this moment. He writes, “oos may be sung with breathy/mysterious vocal tone, emerging from the TB breathy wind “sweeps” and disappearing back into them in each 4-bar phrase.”¹⁰⁷ This gives the conductor a great insight into how the ensemble can achieve what the composer intended. And again, careful listening will help the conductor and singer to achieve these directives.

There may also be the balance issue of the ethereal sound of the MIDI patch. It needs to be heard and experienced along with the audible breathing that Forrest uses at the opening. Not necessarily one more prominent than the other, but each working individually yet cohesively to achieve the desired effect. This balance issue could be a little easier to solve mainly because the keyboard/computer player of the MIDI patch has a volume control to their disposal. Once the

¹⁰⁷ Forrest, *et Deus inspiravit*, notes in score, 7.

desired volume level for the singers is set by the conductor, incorporating the MIDI patch into the sequence will be easier to adjust and maintain that dynamic level.

Table 4 is not exhaustive as to the issues facing the conductor of *the breath of life*, but it highlights issue spots and possible resolution. Many of the issues discussed in the table can be reproduced in multiple places in this work to achieve the composer's desired outcome. Balance issues must be listened to by the conductor but the conductor also needs to be aware of the different gestures needed in order to achieve the desired balance.

Table 4. Potential balance issues in *the breath of life*

Measures	Issue	Resolution
Mvt I, 1-4	Balance of audible breaths with electronic ambient	Match electronic volume with desired vocal sound to ensure both are heard
Mvt I, 13-20	Balance of “sweeping wind” in tenor/bass with the lower strings	Working to have the “sweeping breaths” be prominent but coming in and out of the strings sound
Mvt I, 21-28	Balance of “sweeping wind” of tenor/bass with the soprano/alto “oos” and the orchestra	Balance is conductor’s choice but the tenor/bass “wind” should come in and out of the texture
Mvt I, 29-36	First entrance of text	Be sure text is prominent and understood over orchestra
Mvt I, 37-52	Violin solo	Balance of violin solo amidst the texture of voices and rest of orchestra
Mvt I, 137 and following	Kick drum and drum set too prominent	Reminder to percussionist to stay in the background
Mvt I 145 and following	Balance of voices, soloist and orchestra	All parts balanced in volume with conductor deciding which might be most prominent based on text and lines
Mvt II, all	Balance of voices, some on text and some singing “oo”	Be sure text is prominent and balance based on melodic line
Mvt II, 130-155	Terraced dynamics in voices (<i>P – F – FF – MP – PP</i>)	All voices following dynamics together to achieve the desired crescendo with dramatic decrescendo
Mvt III, 17	Balance of vocal phrasing with solo cello	Musical phrasing is important for both parts
Mvt III, 65 and following	Balance of <i>FF</i> orchestra parts with voices singing new text	Listen for clarity of text and voices with orchestra support
Mvt III, 91 -115	Tendency of cymbals to be too loud	Encourage smaller strokes and lighter touch
Mvt IV, 8 and following	Vocal parts each with “sweeps”	Each voice section is clearly marked in score to achieve the swelling effect
Mvt IV, 95 to end	Balance of vocal “oos”, percussion, MIDI patch	All parts fading out with ending “audible breath” into silence of nothing

Importance of the Gesture

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music says, “the primary duties of the conductor are to interpret the score in a way that reflects the specific indications in that score, set the tempo, ensure correct entries by ensemble members, and "shape" the phrasing where appropriate.”¹⁰⁸ For all conductors, the gesture is the means of communication to the musicians what is desired or even required musically and even emotionally. In chapter one of the book, *The Conductor's Toolbox*, Richard Sparks writes:

What we do as conductors is craft as well as art. In the same way any new or experienced artisan gradually builds a set of skills and learns to use the tools of the trade, we build a box of tools to help us learn, understand, and interpret music and to rehearse and conduct it.¹⁰⁹

He goes on in this book to elaborate on mental and physical preparation of the gesture and how to achieve it. Multiple gestures will need to be employed depending on the interpretation of the conductor while also following the composer's notated score. These gestures must be thought out and practiced beforehand so they will be effective in the rehearsal teaching and then can be employed in the final performance. Linda Tedford, founder and director of the Susquehanna Chorale said “a conductor's toolboxes will be filled with tools that many times will only be used one time in a career and other tools that might never be used. We are always learning and adding to our tools, so they are always there if the time comes when you finally need it.”¹¹⁰

Concluding Thoughts on Forrest's *the breath of life*

In the world of choral music, the name, Dan Forrest has become synonymous with great choral writing that is accessible by all varieties of singing groups. From accompanied choral

¹⁰⁸ Michel Kennedy et al.. “Conducting”, In *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁹ Richard Sparks, *The Conductor's Toolbox* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2019), 17.

¹¹⁰ Author's communication with Linda Tedford, Summer of 2012.

pieces, a cappella choral pieces and large-scale commissioned works, his music has become more and more loved as the years pass. Many conductors can't wait for the next work to be published by this internationally acclaimed composer.

When this piece was composed, little did the composer know what an impact it would have not just in the choral society, but society in general. The impact has just begun and will last for many years to come for sure. With the issues affecting society like the COVID-19 pandemic and the vast number of lives lost to the pain and death associated with the George Floyd murder and how it has also affected society, this piece, *the breath of life*, can have a great healing impact for many. This wasn't the initial goal for Forrest when composing it, but it has morphed into and will continue to impact its audiences for the betterment of society.

the breath of life, encompasses all aspects of what a choral conductor would expect in a piece by Forrest. He has crafted beautiful melodic lines that choral conductors and singers alike have come to love and often expect. He has written rich harmonies shared between voices and instruments that aid in supporting the emotional connection of the texts. He has chosen deep and emotionally stimulating texts that adequately flow together to create a seamless work of music that help take the audience from the beginning to the end of life. The newly added element in *the breath of life* is the use of an electronic MIDI patch that aids in the ethereal effect desired of a breath and how it begins and ends. This added effect takes this work to a whole new emotional level and almost creates an "out of body" sound experience for the audience.

All of these parts together with a full, rich orchestra sound make *the breath of life* a piece that this author hopes to perform in the near future and believes it will be performed multiple times in many years to come. Each study by conductor and musicians and performance will be a salve to those who are hurting. Hurt comes in different forms and it continues from generation to

generation. This piece can help the hurting as it creates a wonderful picture of life and how it continues even after death. Forrest reminds us that when breath ceases, life doesn't end. Your story lives on in others.

This comprehensive study of *the breath of life* is hoped to give understanding and guidance to aspects of a conductor's pre-rehearsal all the way through to the culmination of the performance. The hope of this author is that any conductor who chooses to perform *the breath of life* will find this guide helpful and informative, and that all who perform and hear Forrest's music will find it stimulating both musically and emotionally.

In closing, a reminder of what Forrest said about music in general and ties so closely to the impact of *the breath of life*: "...it's such a beautiful way to minister to people in terms of providing music for comfort, music for celebration, music for memorials, music that speaks peace or hope or seeks to bind up wounds or provide healing when there's brokenness."¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Harris, "Meet an acclaimed composer in Greenville's own backyard."

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Date: 04/06/2022

Principal Investigator: Brian Dukeshier

Committee Action: **IRB Review Not Required**

Action Date: 04/06/2022

Protocol Number: [2203037549](#)

Protocol Title: Application for IRB Approval for my dissertation

Expiration Date:

Project is focusing on one specific individual, falling under the scope of scholarly and journalistic activities. Findings will not be generalizable and therefore does not meet the definition of "research".

As noted above, the University of Northern Colorado IRB has reviewed your protocol and determined that your submission does not meet the federal definition of "human subjects" and/or "research" according to CFR 45 Part 46.

§46.102(e)(1)

Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research:

- (i) Obtains information or biospecimens through intervention or interaction with the individual, and uses, studies, or analyzes the information or biospecimens; or
- (ii) Obtains, uses, studies, analyzes, or generates identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens.

§46.102(l)

Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities that meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program that is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service



programs may include research activities. For purposes of this part, the following activities are deemed not to be research:

(1) Scholarly and journalistic activities (e.g., oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, and historical scholarship), including the collection and use of information, that focus directly on the specific individuals about whom the information is collected.

Project activities as set forth in this submission do not require IRB oversight and approval. However, if your procedures change and/or you decide to generalize your findings, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs to further discuss if IRB approval would be needed.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO USE MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Dan Forrest

COMPOSER. PIANIST. EDUCATOR.

This letter serves as written permission for Brian Dukeshier to use incipit/excerpt examples from **the breath of life** for educational/research purposes in his published dissertation.



Dan Forrest

