



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Ruach for String Quartet (2017)

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Blog Series: Re/Kindling Creativity and Imagination

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Tags: music | spirit | orchestra

Delvyn Case · Ruach (Revised Version)

The Hebrew word *Ruach* means both “breath” and “spirit.” Fundamental to this word (and to the Greek analogue, *pneuma*, which also is used in both ways) is a paradox. The notion of

“spirit” denotes something ineffable and invisible - yet something that is always ready to break through and make itself known in a transformative way. Catholic mystics, African griots, and Christian Pentecostals are well-known examples of religious people who - when filled with the “spirit” - sing, dance, pray, feel, or see things that are amazing, powerful, and even out of their control.

In the same way, “breath” is something simultaneously ineffable and invisible - yet also so fundamentally physical that our bodies do it without our conscious thought. We usually only become aware of our breathing when we experience something surprising or particularly important:

when something beautiful makes us catch our breath, our something frightening makes us cry

out

in terror. In the same way, we are not usually aware of our “spirit” except in special circumstances:

in a religious or spiritual state, for example, or when we have to call upon something deep within

us in order to create - or to endure.

This piece, *Ruach*, confronts this paradox by bringing to our awareness many different ways “breath”

and “spirit” can become sonically and dramatic present. Throughout the piece the performers are

asked to make various kinds of breath sounds with their instruments and their own voices, blurring

the line between music and sound. Overall, the piece emphasizes idea of the spirit as a powerful

force that is surprising, shocking, and fundamentally resistant to control.

Premiered by the Borromeo Quartet

Ruach

$\text{♩} = 84$

Voice 1: *mp* haa *mf* hoo **HAH!** *f*

Violin I: *p* *senza vib.* *mp* *mf* *fp* *fp*

Violin II: *ff* *arco* *ricochet* *mp* *mf* *p* *gasp* *HUH* hoo *ff* *5* *fp* *HAH!* *molto sul pont.*

Viola: *ff* *molto sul pont.* *5* *f* *modo ord.* *p* *mp* *haa* *tr.* *molto sul pont.* *f* *p* *mf*

Violoncello: *f* *gliss.* *arco* *gasp* *huh* *molto sul pont.* *3* *hoo* *pizz.* *mp*

<https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2021/03/ruach-for-string-quartet-2017/>