

BREATHE

Program Note

Much of the year 2020 is epitomized by the concept of being deprived of breath. From the lung-destroying effects of COVID-19, to the murderous strangulations of police brutality. From the searing, choking walls of wildfire smoke, to the smothering evil of politicians attempting to asphyxiate democracy.

It was tempting to title this piece, “2020”. But the pandemic, the systemic racism, the climate changes and the abuses of power that churned malevolently as I composed this music, while heightened by a collective awareness, are not new.

As quarantine has led millions of people to repeat the same day over and over, a simple theme of twelve notes repeats nine times, painfully slowly, always in the same order. A piano, rather than a wind instrument from which a deadly virus might be spread, offers up one pensive note at a time, paired with an atmospheric soundscape. As people attempt to stay connected to others through the internet, the combination of isolation and technology are a familiar theme.

The static bleakness begins in grayness, becoming only more grim as time passes. Three quarters through, the orchestration begins to fill with sounds made from humans, not computers. The electronic track stops. The technology stops. All we hear are live musicians as the conductor, formerly tethered to unrelenting demands of a metronomic click track, becomes free to allow the ensemble breathe freely. Phrases climb upward from uncertainty, but of course there is no resolution. There can never be a resolution, because humans are not capable of such. But there can be hope, and breath.

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