

Robert Guthrie

A Breath or Two

(2024)

for chamber orchestra

Full Score

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A Breath or Two is a short work for chamber orchestra, whose conception is owed to the ebb and flow of breath, and its power to instill calmness and clarity. The form of the piece illustrates two deepening breaths, followed by a stillness which gradually lulls and swells into a dense and powerful cacophony, quickly extinguished to expose an enduring clarity in the closing moments.

Taking much inspiration from impressionist compositions of Ravel, the opening begins with a shimmering string texture, employing the natural harmonics of the instruments to create an airy and atmospheric timbre. Woodwind instruments gradually enter as the harmony begins to expand outwards from the clear major triads of the opening. Growing through additive harmonic processes focussed on extending chords outwards using alternating thirds, the harmonies become increasingly rich alongside the texture before dissipating quickly, as a deep exhale.

The second breath is increasingly dramatic and less atmospheric than the opening. Here, scurrying ascending scale motifs define the build as the timbre becomes richer with the entry of trumpets, the trombone and percussion. As more rhythmic figures become prominent, so do the harmonies become tense and increasingly dissonant. Following some movement between whole tone scales they eventually blend together creating a climactic moment with the full orchestra and full range of pitches creating a powerful climax, punctuated by off beat jabs which stun intensity into retreating.

Following the cathartic exhale of this moment we reach a comparative stillness. With a focus on Ds the instruments pass sounds between them in a Penderecki-style lulling. From here the additive harmonic processes return, and the timbre gently, almost imperceptibly at time expands with instruments entering from behind one another. This final inflation represents an acknowledgement of a mindful clarity brought on by a deep breath, and in a final retreat we are left with a still, sustained interval of a tone, which endures, before fading to the distance.

Instrumentation

2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in B \flat
2 Bassoons

2 Horns in F
2 Trumpets
Trombone

Percussion (2 Players)
Timpani (D)
Snare Drum

7 Violin I
6 Violin II
5 Viola
4 Cello
2 Double Bass

Full score written in C

Performance notes

General

 Change very gradually from one sound or way of playing (etc.) to another.

 Diminuendo al niente

 Crescendo dal niente

ord.ordinary (after any instruction)

Strings

All harmonics are natural (resultant pitch is notated with $^{\circ}$ above).

Splits:

Assume all players play in unison, unless (*div.*) is marked for the specific passage

In divisi (*div.*) sections: Violins I split 1-4 and 5-7

Violins II split 1-3 and 4-6

Violas split 1-3 and 4-5

s.p. Sul Ponticello

N. Normal (after s.p.)

A Breath Or Two

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$\text{♩} = 50$

Flutes 1, 2

Oboes 1, 2

Clarinets 1, 2 in B \flat

Bassoons 1, 2

Horns 1, 2 in F

Trumpets 1, 2 in B \flat

Trombone

Timpani

Snare Drum

Harp

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello I

Violoncello II

Double Bass

$\text{♩} = 50$

16

Fl. 1, 2 *a2.* *pp* 3 6

Ob. 1, 2 *a2.* *p* 3 6

Cl. 1, 2 *p* *mp* *soft accents...* 6 6 6

Bsn. 1, 2 *a2.* *mp*

Hn. 1, 2 *mute* *pp* *Cup Mute* 6

Tpt. 1, 2 *pp* 6

Tbn. *p*

Timp. *pp* *mp*

S. D.

Harp. *mp* *f* *mp* 6 6 6

Vln. I *s.p.* *pp* 9 *f*

Vln. II *mf* *p* 9 9

Vla. *gliss.* *p* 9

Vc. I *p* *ff* *gliss.* *gliss.*

Vc. II *pizz.* *f*

DB. *pizz.* *a2.* *f*

19

Fl. 1, 2

Ob. 1, 2

Cl. 1, 2

Bsn. 1, 2

Hn. 1, 2

Tpt. 1, 2

Tbn.

Timp.

S. D.

Hp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. I

Vc. II

DB.

soft accents...

1. *mf* 9

2. *mp* 3

1. *pp* 6

2. *pp*

1. *p* *pp* *mf*

2. ord. *mf*

ord. 2. *pp*

1. *p* *mp* *f*

N. *p*

p 9

mp 9

mf 3

pizz.

22

Fl. 1, 2 *mp* 3 *f* 3 *ff* *p*

Ob. 1, 2 1. *mf* 9 2. *mf* 9 a2. *ff* 9 *p* a2.

Cl. 1, 2 *f* 1. *f* 9 *f* 3 a2.

Bsn. 1, 2 *p* *ff* a2. *mf* gliss.

Hn. 1, 2 1. *p* *ff* *mp* *ff* *mp* *ff* a2. *ff*

Tpt. 1, 2 *f* a2. *ff*

Tbn. cup mute. *f* 3 gliss. gliss.

Timp. *mp* *mp* *mf* *mp*

S. D. **||**

Hp. *mf* *f* *mf*

Vln. I *mp* 6 *mf* 6 6 6

Vln. II *mf* 9 *mp* 3 3 3 3 *mf* 3 3 3

Vla. *mf* 3 *f* 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9

Vc. I arco

Vc. II arco

DB. arco *f*

25

Fl. 1, 2 *ff* *f* *p* *ppp* 1.

Ob. 1, 2 *ff*

Cl. 1, 2 *ff* *f* *pp* 2. *pp*

Bsn. 1, 2 *ff* *f* *pp* 2. *mf*

Hn. 1, 2 *ff* *f* *ppp* *mf* *pp* *mp*

Tpt. 1, 2 *ppp* *mf* *pp*

Tbn. *f* *ppp* *mf* *pp*

Timp. *mf* *mf* *f* *p*

S. D.

Hp. *ff*

Vln. I *pp* con sord.

Vln. II *pp* con sord.

Vla. *pp* *mf*

Vc. I *pp* *mf*

Vc. II *p* con sord.

DB. *mp* *mf* *mp* *gliss.* *gliss.*

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains measures 25 through 30. It features a full orchestral ensemble including woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon), brass (Horn, Trumpet, Trombone), percussion (Timpani, Snare Drum, Cymbals, Triangle, Harp), and strings (Violin I & II, Viola, Violoncello I & II, Double Bass). The score is written in a common time signature with a key signature of one flat. Dynamics range from fortissimo (ff) to pianissimo (ppp). Performance instructions include 'a2.' for alternate fingerings, '1.' and '2.' for first and second endings, 'con sord.' for mutes, and 'gliss.' for glissandos. The woodwinds and strings play melodic lines with various articulations and dynamics, while the brass and percussion provide harmonic support and rhythmic patterns. The harp features a complex texture with multiple 9-measure runs.

