

Dedicated to Julie Flanders, for holding me so near to her heart and art. Winner of the 2020 Genesis Prize, American Choral Directors Association.

Holding Our Breath

SATB / SSAA / TTBB unaccompanied

(2021)

Carlos Cordero

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'S' for soprano and the bottom staff is labeled 'A' for alto. Both staves are in 4/4 time and feature a treble clef. The music consists of a series of notes: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a half note B4. The soprano part has a small box with an asterisk (*) above the final B4 note, indicating an optional high B. The alto part has a small box with an asterisk (*) above the final B4 note, indicating an optional high B.

* : Optional high B

ABOUT THE WORK

Breathing is what keeps us alive. It is the mechanism that allows us to sing and communicate. Whenever we are troubled or are in a time of crisis, our instincts are to either hold our breath or to breathe. Taking slow breaths and centering ourselves is what brings us back to a more serene state. During this pandemic, breathing has been deemed dangerous, being the principle mechanism of how COVID-19 is spread. It is also the time where the phrase “I can’t breathe” became the powerful last words that moved an entire nation to demand rights, not only for the life of a man, but an entire population. Breathing is a cycle that can’t and should not be interrupted.

Holding Our Breath is a piece about facing the fear to breathe: on an individual level as well as next to each other again, and the courage to be together once more; slowly taking in what it means to be alive and singing next to one another.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Sorrowful ♩ = c. 76

17 *p* *f*

Can you breathe?

random gasps continue.

Perform a short/heavy glissando at the end of the phrase, expressing fear and despair.



Example diagram of section E:



The singers will gradually change from singing, to humming, to audible calmed breathing.



Though the places where this happens are stated in the score, feel free to make your plan to avoid this transition to feel rigid.



Singing

Humming

Breathing



TEXT
Julie Flanders

What happened?
(audible gasp)

With this one breath
I pray

What is happening (to us)
(audible gasp)

With this one breath
I hope

Can you breathe?
Please, help me!

With this one breath
I let go

I can't...
"I can't breathe"

With this one breath
I stay

Can you breathe?
Can we breathe again?

With this one breath
I say I love You

We are holding on
We are holding our breath

With this one breath
I say goodbye

With this one breath
We Breathe.

(audible sigh)

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Holding Our Breath

Julie Flanders (b. 1959)

for SSAA unaccompanied (SATB and TTBB versions available)

Carlos Cordero (b. 1992)

A Elegant, with confidence ♩ = 72

Musical score for "Holding Our Breath" by Carlos Cordero, dedicated to Julie Flanders. The score is for SSAA unaccompanied and is marked "Elegant, with confidence" with a tempo of ♩ = 72. It features four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/8. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, and *pp*, and performance instructions like "Mm" (murmur) and "A few singers perform random audible gasps". The score is divided into measures 1-8, 5-8, 9-12, and 13-16. A large watermark "PERUSSAL SCORES" is overlaid on the page.

* : A few singers perform random audible gasps. Start slowly, with a few, and add as the drama builds.

Sorrowful ♩ = c. 76

17 *p* *f* *mf* *p*

Can you breathe? Can you breathe?

random gasps continue.

Can you breathe? Can you breathe?

21 *pp* *f* *pp* *p* *f* *f*

Can you breathe? Please, help me, Help me!

Can you breathe? Can you breathe?

B Desperate, afraid ♩ = 84 *accel.*

fp *f* *mf* *f* *p*

Please! help me, please help me,

f *f*

I can't breathe I can't breathe

29 *f* *mf* *f* *f*

please help me please help me

mp *f* *f*

I can't breathe I can't breathe

* : Section B: a few singers speak the text "What happened? What's happening to us? Can you breathe? Please, help me!"



Agonizing ♩ = 108 (Crescendo. Intense, loud, chaotic.)

sub. p

can't I can't I can't I can't breathe breathe breathe

33

I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I

sub. p

I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't

Detailed description: This block contains musical notation for measures 33 and 34. It features two staves. The top staff has lyrics: "can't I can't I can't I can't breathe breathe breathe". The bottom staff has lyrics: "I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I". The music is in a minor key and consists of eighth and quarter notes with accents.

*: Altos 2 speak, sigh, scream the text "What's happening? What's happening to us? Can you breathe? Please, help me!"

breathe I can't breathe breathe breathe breathe I

35

can't breathe breathe I can't breathe breathe I

I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I

Detailed description: This block contains musical notation for measures 35 and 36. It features two staves. The top staff has lyrics: "breathe I can't breathe breathe breathe breathe I". The bottom staff has lyrics: "can't breathe breathe I can't breathe breathe I". The music continues with eighth and quarter notes.

can't breathe breathe breathe breathe breathe I can't I can't

37

can't breathe breathe I can't breathe breathe I can't

can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't

ff

Detailed description: This block contains musical notation for measures 37 and 38. It features two staves. The top staff has lyrics: "can't breathe breathe breathe breathe breathe I can't I can't". The bottom staff has lyrics: "can't breathe breathe I can't breathe breathe I can't". The music ends with a double bar line and a forte (*ff*) dynamic marking.

39 Still, empty (at least 10 seconds)

Detailed description: This block shows two empty musical staves for measures 39 and 40, with the instruction "Still, empty (at least 10 seconds)".

C Sorrowful ♩ = c. 76

pp Can you breathe? *mf* Can you breathe?

pp Can you breathe? *mf* Can we breathe? _____

45 *ppp* Can we breathe? _____ *p* Can we breathe a - gain? _____ *mp*

ppp Can we breathe? _____ *p* Can we breathe a - gain? _____ *mp*

49 *mp* We are hold - ing on, *p* hold - ing our breath. _____

D Hopeful, moving forward ♩ = 84

p With this one breath _____ I pray, *mp* with this one

mp with this one breath _____

57 *mf* *p*

breath I hope, with this one breath I let

mf *p*

with this one breath I let

I hope

I stay *p* I stay

61 *mf* *p*

go, I stay, *p* I stay

go, I stay, *p*

mf I stay, I stay

65 *mf* *f*

I say I love you, I say I

mf *f*

I say I love you, I say I

69 *p* *f*

love you, I say good - bye, with this one

p *f*

love you, I say good - bye,

* : Stem up can be performed by a soloist or small ensemble, and the high B is optional. If not performing the high B, sustain A as a half note.

E

breath _____ We _____ breathe _____ we _____

pp

breathe, _____

ppp

breathe, _____

77 — breathe A - gain, _____ We _____

pp

breathe, _____

pp

breathe, _____

81 — breathe A - gain, _____ gain, _____

p

breathe, _____

p

breathe, _____

85 — A - gain, _____ We breathe _____ a - gain, _____

mp

breathe, _____

mp

breathe, _____

breathe, _____ We breathe _____ a - gain, _____ We

* : Singers change one by one to humming. In each measure, a new group of singers change.

89 *mf* A - gain, We breathe a - gain, breathe, We breathe, We

93 *mp* A - gain, breathe, We breathe, We

mp breathe, We breathe, We

97 *calm, audible breathing. Breath in and out as if you were meditating.*

breathe

calm, audible breathing. Breath in and out as if you were meditating.

breathe

101

* : Singers change one by one to calm, audible breathing. In each measure, a new group of singers joins.

Austin, December 2020.



Duration: approx. 5'20"