

DT0109 | LEARNING TO BREATHE | TRUMBORE  
SATB CHORUS & PIANO

# LEARNING TO BREATHE

SATB Chorus & Piano  
Text by Diane Thiel

daletrumbore  
c o m p o s e r



DIANE THIEL is the author of twelve books of poetry and nonfiction. Her latest poetry collection, *Questions from Outer Space*, appeared in 2022 (Red Hen Press) and received the 2023 Independent Press Award. Her work has appeared widely in publications such as two Best American poetry anthologies, including *Best American Poetry 2023*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Harvard Review*, *Poetry* and is reprinted in over sixty major anthologies. Thiel received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Brown University. A Regents' Professor at University of New Mexico, her awards include PEN, NEA and Fulbright Awards. Thiel has traveled the world with her young family, working on literary and environmental projects. [dianethiel.net](http://dianethiel.net)



DALE TRUMBORE is a Los Angeles-based composer and writer whose music has been called “devastatingly beautiful” (*The Washington Post*) and praised for its “soaring melodies and beguiling harmonies deployed with finesse” (*The New York Times*). Trumbore's compositions have been performed widely in the U.S. and internationally by the Chicago Symphony's MusicNOW ensemble, Conspirare and the Miró Quartet, Los Angeles Children's Chorus, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Modesto Symphony, Pasadena Symphony, and Phoenix Chorale. She has written extensively about working through creative blocks and establishing a career in music in essays and in her first book, *Staying Composed*. Learn more about Trumbore's music and writing at [daletrumbore.com](http://daletrumbore.com).

## LEARNING TO BREATHE

I grew up holding my breath.  
It was something I could do.  
As a child, I could dive ten fathoms down  
for that sand dollar  
or something else that looked like treasure.  
I could swim the length of an Olympic pool  
and back underwater, and further,  
always pushing it further,  
training my lungs to let me stay longer.  
In my home, I often felt I had no power,  
but there was power

in being able to always push it further.

When I later learned to deep-sea dive  
I had to go against  
that inclination to hold my breath.  
For me, there was significant adjusting,  
as a body of water meant  
to get down there and back up  
in the short time that I had.  
I had to learn to breathe steadily,  
the main rule, never hold it.  
At first, I had to say it in my mind  
Never hold your breath.

But once I learned, I loved belonging

to that world, while also being alien to it,  
first through the wrecks on both coasts, then  
volcanos under Santorini, looking for Atlantis,  
and later the perspective from down under,  
the side glance of the sea turtle appearing  
on the barrier reef, gliding over its expanses  
and losses.

Breathing steadily, adjusting carefully  
to changes in depth, even back on land,  
breathing, even in the surge of the unknown,  
breathing, always remembering to

just keep breathing through it.

Diane Thiel

“Learning to Breathe,” from *Questions from Outer Space* (Red Hen Press, 2022).

## PROGRAM NOTE

Diane Thiel's text for *Learning to Breathe* describes a significant difference between swimming underwater and scuba diving. In the latter, holding one's breath is not only discouraged, but can actually be harmful to one's lungs because of the pressure difference that occurs with changes in depth.

I read Thiel's poem as not only a vivid depiction of learning to swim and scuba dive – though of course, it's that, too – but a suggestion for how to live when everything we know is changing. There's a reason, when life becomes complicated, that we often say we feel we're "underwater." When we're stressed, our tendency is to take shallow breaths, forgetting that deep breaths can help relax the nervous system. Thiel's poem encourages us to "just keep breathing through it" – to look around and breathe steadily through our changing landscapes, through terrifying experiences and miraculous ones.

This piece was commissioned by the Washington State University Choirs and Palouse Choral Society, Dean Luethi and Matthew Myers, Conductors, for the 2024 WSU Festival of Contemporary Artists in Music.

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

As the meter changes between simple and compound time, the eighth note should remain consistent throughout.

Marked breaths (inhalation & exhalation) should be natural: perceptible to the audience, but unforced.

A dashed line means carry through the phrase; don't take a breath.

For the piano part:

- Boxes indicate a brief gesture that should be repeated for as long as is indicated by the following arrow. Notes within boxes should be played first as written, then in any order, rippling, ebbing and flowing gently between the speed of 16th notes and 8th notes.
- A greyed-out rest in an aleatoric measure indicates duration only. Rippling notes should continue through this greyed-out rest.

Commissioned by the Washington State University Choirs and Palouse Choral Society,  
Dean Luethi and Matthew Myers, Conductors, for the 2024 WSU Festival of Contemporary Artists in Music.

# Learning to Breathe

for SATB chorus & piano

Text by Diane Thiel

Music by Dale Trumbore

♩ = ca. 100 with rubato

Chorus: [inhale]

Piano

*f* *pp* *mf*

Chorus: [inhale]

\*Notes within boxes should be played first as written, then in any order, rippling quickly, ebbing and flowing gently between the speed of 16th notes and 8th notes.

5

*f* *pp* *f*

Chorus: [inhale]

8

*mf* Chorus: [inhale]

I grew up hold-ing my breath. It was some-thing I \_\_\_ could do.

*mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

8

*f* *pp* *mf* *pp* *mp*

Chorus: [inhale]

12 Slower; ♩ = ca. 80  
*mp*

As a child, I could dive down or  
As a child, I could dive ten fathoms down for that sand dollar or  
As a child, I could dive ten fathoms down or  
As a child, I could dive ten fathoms down for that sand dollar or

12 Slower; ♩ = ca. 80

*mp pp mf pp*

Red.

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal and piano accompaniment for measures 12-15. The vocal part is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in a four-part setting. The tempo is marked 'Slower' with a quarter note equal to approximately 80 beats per minute. The dynamic is mezzo-piano (mp). The lyrics are: 'As a child, I could dive down or' (Soprano), 'As a child, I could dive ten fathoms down for that sand dollar or' (Alto), 'As a child, I could dive ten fathoms down or' (Tenor), and 'As a child, I could dive ten fathoms down for that sand dollar or' (Bass). The piano accompaniment is in a 3/4 time signature and features chords and arpeggiated patterns. Dynamics include mezzo-piano (mp), pianissimo (pp), and mezzo-forte (mf). A 'Red.' marking is present at the bottom of the piano part.

17 *mf*

some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure. I could swim the length of  
some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure. I could swim the length of  
some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure.  
some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure.

17 *mf p mf*

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal and piano accompaniment for measures 17-20. The vocal part is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in a four-part setting. The tempo is marked 'Slower' with a quarter note equal to approximately 80 beats per minute. The dynamic is mezzo-forte (mf). The lyrics are: 'some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure. I could swim the length of' (Soprano), 'some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure. I could swim the length of' (Alto), 'some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure.' (Tenor), and 'some-thing else\_ that looked like treas-ure.' (Bass). The piano accompaniment is in a 4/4 time signature and features chords and arpeggiated patterns. Dynamics include mezzo-forte (mf) and piano (p). A 'Red.' marking is present at the bottom of the piano part.

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Learning to Breathe

29 ♩ = ca. 88 rit. . . . . ♩ = ca. 66

long - er.

long - er.

long - er.

long - er.

♩ = ca. 88 rit. . . . . ♩ = ca. 66

mf 3 3 mf

34 *pp* *no cresc.*

In my home, I of-ten felt I had no pow-er, but there was

In my home, I of-ten felt I had no pow-er, but there was

In my home, I of-ten felt I had no pow-er, but there was

In my home, I of-ten felt I had no pow-er, but there was

34 *p* *pp* *mf*

40 *mp* **poco accel.** . . . . . ♩ = ca. 80

power in be - ing a - ble to al - ways push it fur - ther.

power in be - ing a - ble to al - ways push it fur - ther.

power in be - ing a - ble to al - ways push it fur - ther.

power in be - ing a - ble to al - ways push it fur - ther.

40 **poco accel.** . . . . . ♩ = ca. 80

44

*f* *pp* *mf* *pp*

*Ped.*

47

Learning to Breathe

51

When I lat-er learned to deep - sea dive\_\_ I had to go a-against that in- cli - na-tion to hold my

When I lat-er learned to deep - sea dive\_\_ I had to go a-against that in- cli - na-tion to hold my

When I lat-er learned to deep - sea dive\_\_ I had to go a-against that in- cli - na-tion to hold my

When I lat-er learned to deep - sea dive\_\_ I had to go a-against that in- cli - na-tion to hold my

51

57

breath. For me, there was sig - nif - i - cant\_\_ ad - just - ing, as a bod-y of wa - ter

breath. For me, there was sig - nif - i - cant\_\_ ad - just - ing, as a bod-y of wa - ter

breath. For me, there was sig - nif - i - cant\_\_ ad - just - ing, as a bod-y of wa - ter

breath. For me, there was sig - nif - i - cant\_\_ ad - just - ing, as a bod-y of wa - ter

57

rit.

63

meant to get down there and back up in the short time that I had.

meant to get down there and back up in the short time that I had.

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal staves for measures 63 through 68. It features four staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and two piano accompaniment staves (Treble and Bass). The music is in 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are "meant to get down there and back up in the short time that I had." The tempo marking "rit." is placed above the first staff. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and a final section marked "pp" (pianissimo) with a "rit." marking and the instruction "rippling gradually slows to a complete stop".

rit.  
rippling gradually slows  
to a complete stop

pp

*rit.*

69 ♩ = ca. 44

mf p mf p

Detailed description: This block shows the piano accompaniment for measures 69 through 72. It consists of two staves (Treble and Bass) in 9/8 time. The music features a steady accompaniment with triplets and dynamic markings of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano). The key signature remains one sharp (F#).

73

*mp* *mf*

I had to learn to breathe stead-i - ly, the main rule, nev-er hold\_ it.

*mp* *mf*

I had to learn to breathe stead-i - ly, the main rule, nev-er hold\_ it.

*mp* *mf*

I had to learn to breathe stead-i - ly, the main rule, nev-er hold it.

*mp* *mf*

I had to learn to breathe stead-i - ly, the main rule, nev-er hold\_ it.

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal staves for measures 73 through 76. It features four staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and two piano accompaniment staves (Treble and Bass). The music is in 6/8 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are "I had to learn to breathe stead-i - ly, the main rule, nev-er hold\_ it." The tempo marking "rit." is placed above the first staff. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and dynamic markings of *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte).

73

mf p mf p

Detailed description: This block shows the piano accompaniment for measures 73 through 76. It consists of two staves (Treble and Bass) in 6/8 time. The music features a steady accompaniment with triplets and dynamic markings of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano). The key signature remains one sharp (F#).

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88

long-ing to that world, while al - so be - ing a - li - en to it,

long-ing to that world, while al - so be - ing a - li - en to it,

88

*mf* *p*

E<sub>b</sub> F

93

on both coasts, then vol - ca - nos\_ un - der San - to - ri - ni,

first through the wrecks on both coasts, then vol - ca - nos un - der San - to - ri - ni,

first through the wrecks on both coasts, then vol - ca - nos\_ un - der San - to - ri - ni,

first through the wrecks on both coasts, then vol - ca - nos\_ un - der San - to - ri - ni,

93

*pp* *mf* *p*

Ped.

98

look - ing for At - lan - tis, and la - ter the per - spec - tive from down

look - ing for At - lan - tis, and la - ter the per - spec - tive from down

look - ing for At - lan - tis, and la - ter the per - spec - tive from down

look - ing for At - lan - tis, and la - ter the per - spec - tive from down

98

*mp*

sub. *p.*

103

un - der, the side glance of the sea tur - tle ap - pear - ing on the bar - ri - er reef,

un - der, the side glance of the sea tur - tle ap - pear - ing on the bar - ri - er reef,

103

108 *mf* **poco a poco rit.**

gli - ding o - ver its ex - pan - ses and los - ses.

glid - ing o - ver its ex - pan - ses oo

glid - ing o - ver its ex - pan - ses and los - ses.

glid - ing o - ver its ex - pan - ses oo

108 *f* **poco a poco rit.**

*f* *pp*

112 **In time**

Breath - ing stead - i - ly, ad - just - ing care - ful - ly to

Breath - ing stead - i - ly, ad - just - ing care - ful - ly to

Breath - ing stead - i - ly, ad - just - ing care - ful - ly to

Breath - ing stead - i - ly, ad - just - ing care - ful - ly to

112 **In time**

*mp* *pp* *mf* *p*

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123 *pp* *mf*

breath - ing, al - ways re - mem - ber - ing to

breath - ing, al - ways re - mem - ber - ing to

breath - ing, al - ways re - mem - ber - ing to

breath - ing, al - ways re - mem - ber - ing to

123 *mf* *p* *pp*

126 *pp* *mf* *pp*

just keep breath - ing, Just\_ keep breath - ing,

just keep breath - ing, Just\_ keep breath - ing,

just keep breath - ing, Just\_ keep breath - ing,

just keep breath - ing, Just\_ keep breath - ing,

126 *mf* *pp* *mf* *p*

Learning to Breathe

130 *p* *mf*

Just keep breath - ing through it

Just keep breath - ing through it

Just keep breath - ing through it

Just keep breath - ing through it

130 *mf* *p* *mf*

133 *non rit.* *p* [inhale] [exhale] **Conductor slowly lowers hands**

[inhale] [exhale]

[inhale] [exhale]

[inhale] [exhale]

[inhale] [exhale]

133 *p* [inhale] [exhale] **Conductor slowly lowers hands**