

## Program Notes

Musically, it was my goal to set the first half of *Breathe* to music that gives the character (and listener) less and less space. The repeated shortening of the time signature from 12/8 to 9/8 to 6/8 robs the singer of more and more “breathing room” until there isn’t any at all. Finally, she makes space for herself by walking away from the crowd of voices, and the music relaxes as she takes in the very different atmosphere of the forest. The anxiety in the music returns as she tells the trees how “they” made her feel...until she stops and just listens to the silence, and finally, at her own pace, free of any judgment, breathes it in.

A single melody survives the entire length of the piece, and though it adapts and twists through the changes of time signature and key, it persists through to the end.

### Text

she sat at the back and they said she was shy  
she led from the front and they hated her pride  
they asked her advice and then questioned her guidance  
they branded her loud then were shocked by her silence

when she shared no ambition they said it was sad  
so she told them her dreams and they said she was mad  
they told her they’d listen then covered their ears  
and gave her a hug whilst they laughed at her fears

and she listened to all of it thinking she should  
be the girl they told her to be, best as she could  
but one day she asked what was best for herself  
instead of trying to please everyone else

so she walked to the forest and stood with the trees  
she heard the wind whisper and dance with the leaves  
she spoke to the willow, the elm and the pine  
and she told them what she’d been told time after time

she told them she felt she was never enough  
she was either too little or far, far too much  
too loud or too quiet, too fierce or too weak  
too wise or too foolish, too bold or too meek

then she found a small clearing surrounded by firs  
and she stopped and she heard what the trees said to her  
and she sat there for hours not wanting to leave  
for the forest said nothing... it just let her breathe

—Becky Hemsley, 2021

**Jeremy Landig (b. 1973)**

For biographical information visit:  
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Catalog No. 1.3731

# Breathe

(She Sat at the Back)  
for SSA Chorus and Piano


Becky Hemsley

Jeremy Landig

**Brightly, anxiously** (♩. = ca. 100–108)

Piano

*mp* (no sus. pedal)

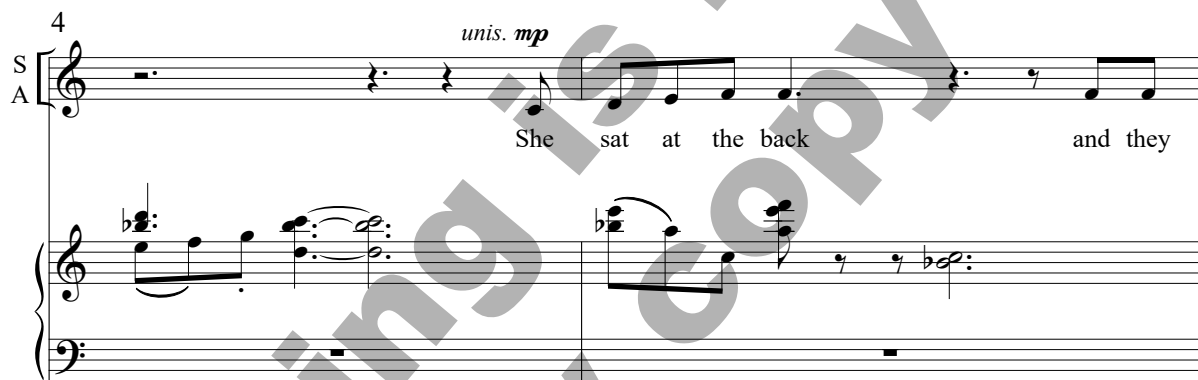


4

S  
A

*unis. mp*

She sat at the back and they



6

said she was shy, she led from the front and they



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8

hat - ed her pride, they asked her ad - vice and then

*Reo.*

*(dry)*

10

ques-tioned her guid - ance, they brand-ed her "loud" then were

*Reo.*

*Reo.*

12

shocked by her si - lence. When she

*mp*

*p*

*Reo.*

15

shared no am-bi-tion they said it was sad, so she told them her dreams and they

*mp*

*(dry)*

*mf*

*Reo.*

*Reo.*

*simile*

18

S1 [Melody]

S2

A

said she was mad, they told her they'd lis - ten, then cov-ered their ears, \_\_\_\_\_ and

said she was mad, they told her they'd lis - ten, then cov-ered their ears, \_\_\_\_\_ and

*mf*

*pedal harmonically*

21

*mp*

gave her a hug while they laughed, laughed at her fears. \_\_\_\_\_ And she

*mp*

gave her a hug while they laughed, laughed at her fears. \_\_\_\_\_ And she

23

*unis.*

lis - tened to all of it, think - ing she should be the

lis - tened to all of it, think - ing she should be the

*mp*

25

girl they told her to be best as she could, but one

girl they told her to be best as she could, but one

The musical score for measures 25 and 26 features a vocal melody in G major (one sharp) and a piano accompaniment. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The piano part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

27

day \_\_\_\_\_ she asked what was best for her - self, in -

day \_\_\_\_\_ she asked what was best for her - self, in -

Measures 27 and 28 continue the vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes a long note for the word 'day' and a phrase ending with a dash. The piano accompaniment remains consistent with the previous measures.

29

stead \_\_\_\_\_ of try'ng to please ev - 'ry - one else.

stead \_\_\_\_\_ of try'ng to please ev - 'ry - one else.

Measures 29 and 30 conclude the vocal phrase. The piano accompaniment features a more active right hand in measure 30, with sixteenth-note runs leading to a final chord. The left hand provides harmonic support with sustained chords.

Slightly slower (♩. = 98)

[ $\frac{3}{4}$  feel floating over  $\frac{6}{8}$  accompaniment]

32 *mp*

So she walked to the for - est and stood with the

*mp*

So she walked to the for - est and stood with the

Slightly slower (♩. = 98)

*mp*

36 *cresc.*

trees, — she heard the wind whis - per — and dance with the

*cresc.*

trees, — she heard the wind whis - per — and dance with the

[Mel.]

*cresc.*

40 [ $\frac{6}{8}$  feel in voices now]

she spoke — to the wil - low, — the elm and the

leaves, — she spoke — to the wil - low, the elm and the

leaves, she spoke — to the wil - low, the elm and the

44 *unis.*

pine, and she told them what she'd been told

pine, and she told them what she'd been told

47 *cresc.*

time af - ter time: she

time af - ter, time af - ter time: she

50

told them she felt she was nev-er e-nough, she was

told them, she told them she felt she was nev-er e-nough,

52 *p*

S1 ei - ther too lit - tle or far, far too

S2 ei - ther too lit - tle or far, far too

A ei - ther too lit - tle or far, far too

54 *mf*

much, too loud or too qui - et, too

*mf*

much, too loud, loud or too qui - et, too

*f* [Mel.]

much, too loud or too qui - et, too



56

[Mel.] *f*

fierce or too weak, too wise or too fool - ish, too

*f*

fierce too fierce or too weak, wise or too fool - ish, too

(*f*)

fierce or too weak, too wise or too fool - ish, too

58

*p*

bold or too meek. Then she

*mf*

*p*

bold or too meek. Then she

*mf*

[Mel.] *mf*

bold or too meek. Then she

*mp*

*mf*

60 *Maintaining momentum*

S found a small clear - ing \_\_\_\_\_ sur - round-ed by firs, \_\_\_\_\_ and she

A found a small clear - ing \_\_\_\_\_ sur - round-ed by firs, \_\_\_\_\_ and she

*Maintaining momentum*

62 *unis. mp* 2

stopped and she heard what the

stopped and she heard what the

*mp* 2

*mp* 2

*no pedal* *ad lib.*

64 *p* *mf*

trees said to her, \_\_\_\_\_ and she

trees said to her, \_\_\_\_\_ and she

*p* *mf*

*mf*

66

["hours" as two syllables]

sat there for hours not

68

want - ing to leave, for the for-est said

71

Freely *unis. p*

no - thing, it just let her

*p* *rit.*

no - thing, it just let her

Freely *mp* *rit.*

Calmly, warmly (♩ = ca. 76)

74

S1 Breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe.

S2 *p* Breathe, \_\_\_\_\_

A Breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_

Calmly, warmly (♩ = ca. 76)

*p*

78

*cresc. poco a poco*

Breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_

*cresc. poco a poco*

breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_

*cresc. poco a poco*

breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_

*cresc. poco a poco*

81 *(cresc.)*

breathe. \_\_\_\_\_ Breathe. \_\_\_\_\_ *3*

*(cresc.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ breathe. \_\_\_\_\_

*(cresc.)*

Breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ *3*

84 *(cresc.)*

Let \_\_\_\_\_ her breathe, \_\_\_\_\_

*(cresc.)* *(opt.)*

Breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ let \_\_\_\_\_

*(cresc.)*

breathe, \_\_\_\_\_ breathe, \_\_\_\_\_

87 (*cresc.*) *f*

let her breathe.

(*cresc.*) *f*

her breathe,

(*cresc.*) *f*

let her breathe,

89 *p*

Breathe.

*p*

breathe. Breathe.

*p*

breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

92

Breathe. Breathe.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

Breathe. Breathe.

95

*p* *rit.*

hm.

*p*

hm.

*p*

hm.

*rit.*