

The Breath of the Spirit

poetry by Ken Gaertner
music by Gregory Hamilton

Marilyn Mason, organ
Don Fishel, flute
Rudy Alvarado, narrator
Arwen Mosher, narrator

September 25, 2005
St. John Chapel
Plymouth, Michigan

The Breath of the Spirit

Poetry by Ken Gaertner
Musicy by Gregory Hamilton

Duo Pneuma

Marilyn Mason, organ
Donald Fishel, flute

Rudy Alvarado, narrator
Arwen Mosher, narrator

Overture

Annunciation

Children in Praise

Herod

Mary Dancing

Judas

Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas

Poverty Shared

Desert Grief

Pentecost

This work was commissioned by Duo Pneuma in 2003 at the invitation of ICNE Paris.

i.

Annunciation

Her small, delicate feet
had stepped many times
into the small garden,
a weight of great silence within her,
so when the light gathered
in the shape of a small fig tree
her sight was transformed from within,
otherwise the branches
bearing God's unbearable light,
the white eruption of the trunk,
would have seared her uplifted eyes.
It seemed that she now saw
with an inner vision
that opened with
the lowering lids of her eyes,
her bowed silence
her pale, uncreased forehead,
all standing before the towering angel
which remained the lone image,
and yet,
she knew that her eyes
were now swathed in God's robes.
Her hands reached to feel
the face of the great presence
that so engulfed her
and felt only the force of the angel.

Her interior had always glowed
like a lamp,
in the fury of sand storms,
during the great clashing
of white waves upon the sea,
and under that sky
of polished silver
when Joseph flung
his betrothal joy
up to the invincible heavens.

And now this:
the obedient girl
and the obedient angel
and his voice
that so quietly made the announcement.

ii.

Children in Praise

The rabbi and his friends appeared suddenly,
quietly and mysteriously,
as boats sometimes emerged
in the glare of the sunlit sea,
and the children wondered
how these men had come upon them
without footsteps, or bargaining voices,
and why the rabbi was talking to the crippled
beggar.

Most people averted their eyes
when the beggar called to them
and the children,
who played in the street everyday,
had long ago learned to ignore his sneaky looks
as he watched their games with weary envy.
But suddenly the crippled man was ecstatic,
embracing the rabbi's friends,
his once withered arm now reaching
towards the face of Christ
as his straightening legs propelled him upwards.
Christ leaned back and laughed,
but, then, embraced him.

The man's teeth,
shining in his black, unkempt beard,
were like the silver veins
that glow on desert rocks in the moonlight,
yet the air shimmered with the noonday sun
and the flesh of the children's hands
resembled marble floors on which the light
danced.

The children breathed deeply
of this mysterious elation:
something new
but very old in their souls,

something known always
but just now discovered,
and it bubbled up into their wet smiles.
Christ said something to His friends,
and they laughed,
so the children also laughed, and ran about,
grabbing one another,
out of control,
like the beggar's rags,
that were being swirled by the wind.
Then they stopped and watched
as the beggar beat his garments,
knowing that the celebration deserved clothes
that had been taken care of,
the dust streaming away from him
as if it, too, was eager to find its entry
to a higher nature.
Finished, his straight body stood regally
as though he had been made a king
instead of merely a cured cripple.
Christ was already disappearing down the path.
One of his disciples glanced back
and the beggar felt himself start to follow
but instead turned towards the city
shaking with joy and apprehension.
Would his family accept him?
Or would he be seen as an angel
terrifying in his resemblance
of their lost kin?

The children stood around
and looked at one another,
then screaming they followed the rabbi.
They didn't understand
why they were crying as they laughed,
so they would stop,
wipe their eyes,
and hug one another again
before once again running off
having no idea how far they would follow.

Herod

Two luxuries fascinate me:
 the breasts of Herodias
 upon which passion gleams
 as oil on a palm leaf,
 and John's denunciations
 which fly about in his dungeon
 as sparks through fire.

I walk down steep steps
 late at night
 to peer into his cell.
 His tongue wags as a warrior's flag
 above a galloping horse
 and my sins are disturbed
 and set loose in my heart.

His teeth are shiny
 as bits of salt,
 his eyes,
 placid,
 as moon-lit sand.

Sometimes
 I would leave him and set my hands
 over Herodias' breasts
 and she would gasp
 to see me kneeling beside her
 as pale and shadowy as the moon.
 She would say nothing.
 Her breath would flow
 with an odor of honey;
 her tongue would fill my mouth
 as smoothly and succulently
 as a wedge of melon.

Sometimes
 I wouldn't leave John
 the whole night,
 and as he unraveled
 my intentions to me
 it seemed that even my dreams
 were of my doing.
 Visions flew from his tongue
 as nets over sea foam.
 If I started to reason with him
 blood fell in my heart
 as from a high ledge.

Herodias' body is
 a hill of flowers
 over which I settle as a mist.
 Her dark hair is a bush of incense.

When I am finished with Herodias
 her lips are dry berries.

When I visit John
 my heart floats upward
 and detaches itself
 from my breath.

I observe him silently.
 His ribs are like olive branches
 without fruit;
 his teeth are like cranes
 standing in reeds;
 his words are chariots
 bouncing over stones.
 When he calls my name
 his teeth flash as swords colliding,
 his head rises in the darkness
 as a cluster of grapes in the wind.

iv.

Mary Dancing

Mary dancing with her friends,
their feet stomping,
dust puffing about their ankles,
the wedding tambourines
winding their way
through their waving arms,
their flowing waists,
laughing faces surrounding them,
and then the confused faces,
the tug on her arm,
her smiled sigh
as she turned to approach her son.

The sharpness of his retort
quieted her dancing soul
and, obedient, she turned away.
Something greater than dance,
something more precious than joy
was being changed
from the lucidity of water
into the complexity of wine.

She was now lighter than dance,
her knowledge more melodious
than the notes flying from the flutes.
The blood flowing through her
was as rich as the miraculous wine,
the memory of her simple command
to do as he said,
now enunciated by a silence
that bore
as on the draft of a great dove
the immensity of her knowledge.

v.

Judas

When I close my eyes
it's as though I wrap two corpses in
shrouds,
but, immediately,
my eyelids begin to tremble,
and try to bolt.

I pace,
a rustling garment casting shadows
on an empty wall,
stopping only to sit
and rub my toes
and mull on my life of plodding mistakes,
both coarse and divine.

I slipped a ripe fig
(so like a leather purse filled with sweets)
into the palm of my restless nephew.
Our teeth,
exposed to the sun,
glittered all the while He preached.
We were as sheep in a ravine,
pushed and jostled,
flicking beads of sweat from our noses
into the foot defiled earth.

I rise,
and walk into my shadow,
as a stream of wine being poured back
into a flask.

Soon I will scatter my memories
over the sterile earth,
my soul will rattle against my sin.
My vintage will be remembered
as one ripened by the moon.
But it doesn't matter what is remembered.
Mankind's future is mankind's sin.

Still, it's my life
that men's eyes will turn to,
watching my corpse dry and rot
in the branches
of their dead trees.

Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas

Mary

I am like an emptied sea
that has been refilled
with the darkest waters
of rumor and imagination.
Scribes will write my name
and their pens will push the flow of ink
into the white, blind edges of time.
My name is immortal
but only Jesus knows the alphabet
that was used to inscribe my name
upon the imperishable robe
whose fabric is woven
of eternity's pure light and sound.

Thomas

Doubt nourishes the marrow of my bones.
My fingers slid from His wound
and belief stunned me.
As an unwelcome guest in dead of night
betrays one's sleep with responsibilities
so did the Lord's wound awaken me.
I stammered something, some platitude,
and now I sit, eyes downcast,
before a wafer of moon,
the heat of His wound receding from my fingers.
My body is heavy
as though doubt is the gravity
that still holds me fast to the earth's floor.

Mary

No one in this street knows me
but while I walk
His voice within me
whispers my name.
As the fluttering sparrows
desire the seed
in the donkey's swaying baskets
strangers sense His presence
within me,
and their eyes seek mine.
When I close my door I open a gift.
When I am silent light fills me
and my smile is like a boat
drifting upon the sea.
I will grow brighter as I age
but my exterior
will hide my life as bark hides
the flowing sap of the tree.

Thomas

Belief to me is like a gorge in the mountains,
frightening in its possibility
and terrifying in its remoteness.
I was a child who could not believe,
while lying in cool grass,
the dreams he created.
My dreams were beyond me
and if I walked or ran I could not inhabit them.
I have touched his wounds
and my doubt has been rebuked,
yet I struggle to comprehend
what my flesh has revealed to me.
My faith is a split rock in the desert
over which I stumble.
My faith floats within me like debris upon the sea.
My faith is an empty altar
where a priest stands
waiting to sacrifice my doubts.
I am terrified by my salvation.
The Lord has revealed the depth of my doubt to me
and I fear to plunge into that abyss.

Mary

I stood outside the empty tomb,
alone,
crying,
crying alone.
Beside the rolled stone I stood crying.
I had bent like a crane in the reeds
and looked in the tomb
and it was empty.

'Where have they taken my Lord', I cried.
My heart was wrenched with pain
stretching to see where they had taken my Lord.

I was filled with grief.
Like the meadows
that are filled with swaying grass
I was filled with grief.
Like the rolling hills
that are filled with sheep
my soul was trampled with grief.
I was unashamed of my tears.
I stood before a stranger,
confused at his presence,
weeping, unashamed.
He asked me why I wept.
I asked him,
I asked the stranger before me,
did he know where they had taken my Lord?
He,
whose words had created
all those melodies in my soul,
called me by name.
My Lord quietly said my name.
My heart sang as a choir,
my heart became a psalm being sung.
His face ignited before me
and outshone the blazing sun.
I stretched forth my hand
to touch my Lord,
but he raised his hand
and forbade my touch.
He forbade my touch
but my outstretched arm was filled with honey,
my arm with filled with golden honey
and it seeped through me,

and I was filled with sweet honey,
with fragrance and gentle spices.
He smiled and my heart rose in my breast.
As a dove flutters to the temple's highest turret
my heart rose in my breast.
I looked at Him and my spirit uncoiled
as linen being readied for the altar,
He spoke and my own voice
was heard answering
as the surf on the wind blown sea
answers the thunder of the skies.

Thomas

I sit under the midnight sky
whose heathen array
of moon and stars
is like a tyrant and his armies.
But I am unafraid.
The sickle of the moon will not behead me.
The points of the stars will not pierce me.
I hear wine thickened curses in the streets,
a goblet thrown and breaking.
The world stumbles through darkness
believing its shadow to be the light of the sun.

I will hide now with the others.
I will remain silent
in a room above the street's muttered delusions.
As a deep well swallows
the outpouring of the sun,
so has my dark soul swallowed
the words of the Lord.
But I will hide and wait quietly
as The Lord commanded,
wait for light to bubble up
from within my depths.
In the darkest pit of my soul
the bright wings of the Holy Ghost will spread.
The Holy Ghost will whisper my name,
the Holy Ghost
will rouse me from my slumber then
and my spirit will take flight
on His wings . . .

continued . . .

. . . Doubting Thomas and Mary Magdalene

A flaming tongue will be formed in my mouth,
a white fire will burn in my mouth.

My words will fly into the ears of men
as silver beaked eagles fly,
their sharp talons gleaming,
onto the loftiest peaks.

My face will glow
as a fire in the desert,
as a camp fire in the desert,
as the fire of God's army
that burns a hole
in the desert's darkness
that will not be repaired.

I will rise like a desert warrior
as the fire of God roars
and consumes my doubt.

The faces of multitudes will glow
as my words fall upon them
their faces will glow
as fires in the desert.
as the word of God blazes
and consumes their sins.

Poverty Shared

The poor stood
 carrying their poverty in the fragile bones
 of their stooped shoulders,
 their necks straining like stalks of wheat
 in the wind,
 faces uplifted
 as they listened to the preaching rabbi
 their necks straining like ripe wheat
 in a field ready for harvest.
 and that man in the back row,
 a widower,
 a man whose poverty
 lay like a corpse within his soul,
 naked, without shroud,
 an eternal weight upon his life,
 stood, ignoring the sun,
 that swelled as a blister in the sky
 and excreted its acid upon his face.
 The rabbi's stories held him fast.
 As the mountains are held in place
 by the grip of the earth
 so he was held by the rabbi's words.
 The rabbi's words had wings that flew
 into his inner chambers,
 into the ears of his poverty's corpse
 which stirred as earth stirs
 readying itself for an earthquake.
 "Five sparrows are sold for two farthings
 and not one of them is forgotten before god."
 the prisoner sparrow freed from its cage
 to inhabit another cage
 its fate unknown and indifferent to all,
 unknown to all but the One,
 the all-seeing, all-powerful One.
 As the rabbi continued to speak
 the poor man heard no more.

His inward eye which had blinked,
 then opened
 was transfixed on glorious sights.
 His poverty shed its shroud,
 his poverty awakened and glowed within him.
 what was wretched was now simple.
 As shadows
 are rearranged by the floating sun
 so was his soul changed
 until light was at its center
 and shadows were interred in his lost memories.
 He shouted his joy
 his voice flew like a sparrow released
 from it's cage,
 his voice flew over Bethlehem
 and the Romans turned,
 on guard,
 at this strange voice
 that signified nothing to them
 but mystery and its dangers.
 This man,
 whose poverty joined him
 to this Son of God,
 this man,
 this new citizen of a kingdom
 beyond rust or dissolution.
 Could god enter any room
 but that of poverty?
 He closed his eyes
 and saw into his soul,
 and it was full of God's treasures.
 Who could pillage the Lord?
 Who could defile his soul?
 If the lord stored his possessions in his soul
 who could remove them?
 What thief could steal what was god's?
 If the Lord piled his treasures
 in the souls of the poor
 who could plunder them?
 Could the air steal the psalms being sung?
 Could the earth steal the flowers scent?
 He embraced his poverty and begged forgiveness.
 For had not his curse always been his salvation?

Desert Grief

Mary walked slowly,
the sand
the edges of her robe,
her moist eyes,
all silver plated by the moon.
Alone, troubled,
the memory of the cross
tracing wounds upon her pure soul
as the lines of time
had spun webs upon her face.
She sat on the grey rock,
itself like a large tear
on the desolate landscape
and waited for the silence
to announce again
the coming of the Savior.

And then he was there
sitting at her side
and her soul leaped towards him
as a tigress playfully leaps
upon her growing cub.
He stroked her damp cheeks
with that wounded hand
while from the sharp ledges
of the mountains
the burned sins of the world
fell in gray ashes
onto the moonlit sand.

ix.

Pentecost

The spostles sat without speaking,
as though silence itself
had stolen from the room
and left not even the memory
of sound to distract them.
Their breaths seemed to waver
in unison
like heat waves over the desert,
and it seemed as if their souls
had begun to flow past their limits.
Within the anticipating air
particles of dust floated
like planets in a dead universe.
As at dawn,
upon awakening,
the memory of a pleasant task
to be accomplished
slowly emerges
they began to sense the mysterious joy
that was slowly filling the room,
and it was to this purity
that their souls turned,
this radiance
in which they had long ago exulted
while squirming in their mother's arms,
but which had receded
like water receding from a pond
in years of drought.
Now,
with their heads bowed
this ecstasy returned
and filled the room
with a rushing wind,
a hurricane of anticipation
and consummation.
Graces emerged

as fruit laden trees
from a soil
in the depths of their enriched souls
of which they had never been aware.
Visions
like raindrops on a vineyard of grapes,
luminous in the dawn's fresh light,
shone within them.
The Holy Spirit struck deep into the roots
of their souls,
as cowardice, timidity, flowed
in dark sluices
out of the cleft that was opened.
Above them flaming tongues hovered.
Their heads bent back
to receive those flaming tongues
that filled the room with light
and whose terrible fire burned only the terror
within them
until their delusions were ashes
and truth
as bright as Gideon's sword
gleaming in the sunlight
cut through the oppression of their pasts,
and they began to speak
praising this new world.
Standing in the center of this new creation
their feet touching the sacred floor
before racing into the street,
their voices sanctifying even the languages
they now shouted so fluently,
so that the crowd awoke from their dreams
and the apostles voices rose
riding on the waves of praise
from the crowds,
while others writhing in the pain
of their threatened dreams
vowed revenge
promising death to these mad usurpers
who had already died
and could not die again.



Marilyn Mason is University Organist and Chairman of the Organ Department at the University of Michigan. Her extensive career as concert organist, lecturer, adjudicator, and teacher has carried her throughout the musical world. During a single year, invitations took her to five continents. Professor Mason has served as judge at nearly every major organ competition in the world. Her dedication to contemporary music is evidenced in the sixty-five works that she has commissioned and premiered. Currently, she is pursuing her commitment to stylistic integrity through research into the construction and tonal design of historic European instruments. Twenty research tours have focused on historic organs in Europe.

Marilyn Mason was honored as the *1988 Performer of the Year* by the New York Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. Her discography includes music of Bach, Pachelbel, Handel, Mondonville, Alain, and Dupre.



Flute soloist **Donald Fishel** studied at the University of Michigan School of Music under Nelson Hauenstein and Michael Stoune. He then embarked on a career in music publishing and began writing the Christian songs for which he is best known. His hymns *Alleluia No. 1* and *The Light of Christ* can be found in the hymnals of the Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Roman Catholic Churches.

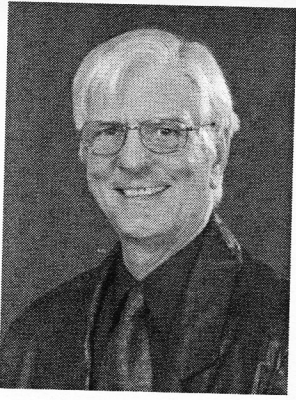
Don Fishel is the principal flutist of the Ann Arbor Civic Band and has played in musical theatre productions with the Chelsea Area Players, Tecumseh Youth Theatre, Saline Area Players, the Comic Opera Guild, and Croswell Opera House. In 2000, he was the flute soloist performing Peter Schickele's *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra* at the Ann Arbor Summer Festival.

Rudolph Alvarado is the head of Ave Maria College's Theatre Department. He holds a Ph.D. from Texas Tech University in Acting, Directing and Theatre Management. He also holds a Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting from Texas Tech and a Master of Arts in History from Eastern Michigan University. As an actor he has appeared in over twenty productions. In his most recent roles he played Che in the musical *Evita* and Billy in *¡Viva, La-Clicka!*. His film credits include Jessie in *A Good 'Ol Fashion West Texas Baptism* and Nathan in *Flight From Life*. Alvarado is also a writer whose creative and scholarly work has been published by the University of Michigan Press, Michigan State University Press and Texas A&M University Press.



Arwen Mosher is a 2005 graduate of Ave Maria College, where she majored in theology. Her interest in acting began in an Introduction to Acting class at Ave Maria College, where she took part in last Spring's production of Henri Gheon's *The Way of the Cross*. She is currently working as a paralegal for a law firm in Plymouth, Michigan. She and her husband of three years live in Ypsilanti. In her spare time, she loves to read fiction and poetry, watch movies, write, and spend time with her family.





Ken Gaertner is a poet/dramatist whose plays have been produced in New York City at The Open Eye Theater, American Theatre of Actors, Actors Institute, Vital Theatre, Samuel French Festival of One-Act Plays, Sale and Pepper Mime, and the Mystic Theatre, along with productions in the Midwest and in Florida. His one-act play *Seventeen Hoofbeats* was published in *Confrontation Magazine* of Long Island University. He has published poetry in *America*, *Commonweal*, *The Christian Century*, *StAR*, *In the West of Ireland*, and numerous other magazines. A book of poetry, *Koan Bread*, was published by Survivors Manual, Oceanside, New York. His poem 911 was awarded the Editor's Choice Award from the *Penwood Review* of Los Alamitos, California.



Gregory Hamilton studied musicology and early music at the Royal College of Music in London, England, before returning to his native state of Michigan, where he commenced organ study with Dr. Marilyn Mason and completed his Doctorate in sacred music and organ in 2000.

As a composer, Dr. Hamilton is published by music and liturgical publishers including Augsburg Fortress, Morning Star, and CanticaNova, featuring organ, piano, and choral music.

As a performer, he is an active recitalist, playing organ recitals, early music, and accompanying chamber music concerts in the U.S. and abroad.

Dr. Hamilton is music director of St. Theresa parish in Houston, Texas.