Spirit, Moving Over Chaos

Text by
Patricia Blaze Clark

Music by
David Ashley White

Chorus, oboe or C inst., percussion, opt. handbells, kybd.
David Ashley White's secular and sacred compositions are widely performed and published. He has received numerous commissions throughout his career, including most recently from the Association of Anglican Musicians, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston/Houston, and the Royal School of Church Music in America. Since 1980, ASCAP has recognized him with an annual award for his activities in composition.

In spring 2007, Gothic label released White's Praise the Spirit. This recording, sung by the Palmer Choir, Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church, Houston, Courtney Daniell Knapp and Brady Knapp, co-directors, contains more of White's anthems, motets, service music, and hymns. Scott Cantrell, writing in the Dallas Morning News, described White as having a “natural feel for vocal line, but also a keen ear for glowing harmonies.” Lindsay Koob, in The American Record Guide, wrote, “His music reveals a distinctly Anglican ring and spirit, yet its Yankee heritage shines through as well.”

White was composer-in-residence at the Mississippi Conference on Music and Liturgy in 1991, 1995, 2003, and 2012, and in 1998 he was composer-in-residence at the Evergreen Church Music Conference in Colorado. He was the 1993 winner of the composition contest sponsored by St. Paul United Church of Christ in Chicago for his festival anthem Cantate Domino, published by Paraclete Press. Other first prizes have come from the Virginia Bandmasters Association, the Texas Federation of Music Clubs, and the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama.

In addition to the extensive publication of White’s choral and instrumental music, his hymns are readily available through a number of sources: the Episcopal Church’s The Hymnal 1982 and Wonder, Love, and Praise; The United Methodist Hymnal and its supplement; the hymnal of the United Church of Christ in Japan; Great Britain’s Worship Songs Ancient and Modern; and Hymns of Universal Praise, published by the Chinese Christian Literature Council LTD, among others. Three collections of his hymns are published by Selah Publishing Co., Pittsburgh, Pa.: Sing, My Soul: The Hymns of David Ashley White (1996), Songs for a New Creation (2002), and New Harmony: A Harp of Thousand Strings (2006). The latter, in collaboration with hymn poet Richard Leach, pays homage to aspects of Southern hymnody style.

With a Bachelor of Music in oboe performance and a Master of Music in composition, both from the University of Houston, White, a seventh-generation Texan, earned the Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently director of the University of Houston Moores School of Music and holds the Margaret M. Alkek and Margaret Alkek Williams Endowed Chair.
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Introduction
\( \frac{1}{4} \) \( \text{\textit{ca. } 63, \text{ mysterious, freely}} \)

Chorus, with Atmosphere

Transition 1
On downbeat of final choral pitch, add organ/piano/synthesizer pedal tone to Atmosphere.

If played on piano, play octaves repeating as necessary to maintain sustained sound.

Begin random keyboard clusters (two or more pitches simultaneously), not limited to this particular octave.

As sounds accumulate (all gently played), they lead to Section 1:
Section 1  Continuing Atmosphere, pedal tone(s), and clusters

Chorus

\begin{music}
\measure{1-4} \textit{Spirit, moving over chaos, bringing light where there was none,}
\end{music}

\begin{music}
\measure{5-8} \textit{be to us a light, revealing where the work is to be done.}
\end{music}

\begin{music}
\measure{9-12} \textit{Praise to God, among us dwelling, praise the Spirit giving light.}
\end{music}

Transition 2  Continuing Atmosphere, pedal tone(s), and clusters with crescendo to \textit{mp} as chorus enters

Section 2  Continuing Atmosphere, pedal tone(s), and clusters

Chorus

\begin{music}
\measure{1-4} \textit{Breath, instilling animation, giving life, informing soul,}
\end{music}

\begin{music}
\measure{5-8} \textit{breathe into all our beings life that makes the Body whole.}
\end{music}

\begin{music}
\measure{9-12} \textit{Praise to God, among us dwelling: praise the Spirit giving life.}
\end{music}

Transition 3  Continuing Atmosphere, etc., with crescendo to \textit{mf} and with increasing rhythmic activity, as chorus enters

4–Spirit, Moving Over Chaos–405-633
Section 3

After chorus enters, Atmosphere, etc. continues with gradual crescendo to \( f \) as chorus and oboe* begin in canon (two or three canonic entrances, coming a few beats apart). Follow chorus dynamic with diminuendo to the end—the last choral statement of melody should have little percussion underlay.

Chorus

\( f \)

\[ \text{Power, Life force, Inspiration, blowing, breathing, brooding here,} \]

\( f \)

\[ \text{call, enliv en, and empower for your work, both far and near.} \]

\( f \)

\[ \text{Praise to God, among us dwelling, praise the Spirit giving strength.} \]

*In a freely expressive style, the oboe enters as the final part of the canon, shortly following the last choral entrance. As the choral part of the canon begins to end and the solo oboe line emerges more, Atmosphere, pedals, and clusters should gracefully make a diminuendo, gradually leaving the oboe line unaccompanied. If necessary, the oboist may repeat final measures of this section in order to achieve the desired effect.

Oboe

\[ \text{as chorus done.--} \]

\[ \text{as chorus done.--} \]

\[ \text{as chorus done.--} \]

\( \text{as chorus done.--} \)

\( \text{as chorus done.--} \)
Transition 4  At the final oboe pitch, Atmosphere begins, again, as in Introduction, pp delicato.

Section 4
Chorus, after percussion Atmosphere is established

As chorus ends, percussion continues briefly, staggering entrances of bell sounds, and then fading away to nothing.
Composer's note

*Spirit Moving Over Chaos* had its genesis as a simple hymn, consisting only of an expressive melodic line with a suggested handbells accompaniment, one that comprised only six pitches (D, E, F♯, G♯, A, and C), all taken from the tune. When the hymn was recorded several years later by the Choir of Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas (*Praise the Spirit*, Gothic Records, G-49254, also available on iTunes), co-director Brady Knapp suggested that we improvise spontaneously, an intriguing approach at the outset of a recording project and certainly a challenge! First, we decided only to use sopranos and altos, although a mixed choir, or men, would also be appropriate. We found a large banner in the Palmer narthex with tiny bells sewn into it, and that was gently shaken to create a mysterious opening effect. Other available percussive sounds were added as the music progressed. One of the singers was also an oboist, with instrument at hand, so she joined in. Brady played a pedal tone D on the organ, then adding tone clusters that created a wonderfully murky effect that eventually propelled us to the high point of the piece. I continued the cluster effect on a synthesizer, also including fragments of the melody.

It is in this spirit of improvisation that this publication was prepared. What is contained on these pages does not necessarily have to be followed literally—rather, this notation could be viewed as an architectural outline, perhaps inspiring new ideas.

The portions marked “transition” are intended to be brief, acting as a connection from one section to the next.

The pitches for pitched percussion and keyboard improvisation are these, in any appropriate octave.

Suggestions for instruments to be used:

1. Rather than oboe: flute, clarinet, violin, or cello.
2. Synthesizer alone would be ideal, rather than organ or piano.
3. Percussion: bells of all kinds, in addition to handbells. Also vibraphone, glockenspiel, finger cymbals, gong, tubular chimes—any “tinkling” kind of percussion.
4. Harp, and almost anything else that would add effective and suggestive color.