

**Stony Brook University  
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

**Abstract**

Ruach

By

**Kent Gustavson**

RUACH uses a poem of the same title for its text, written by Cynthia Blomquist Gustavson. The piece is written for a Baroque ensemble, consisting of a Mezzo-Soprano, 2 Violins, a Viola Da Gamba and a Harpsichord. It is, like the poem of its origin, divided into four sections of different emotional and technical content, with continuity of similar harmonic content between movements.

Although Baroque instruments were chosen for this composition, the sound of American traditional fiddle and singing find themselves in the gamba, violin and harpsichord, (similar also to fleshy, homemade mountain instruments such as dulcimer, fiddle, etc.).

Ruach occupies, as does much contemporary art music, a world between intellect and emotion. The technical goal of Ruach is to both appease the longing of the greater music-listening world for diatonic music, and the academic desire of composers to embed purpose, patterns into their polyphonic concepts. At the same time, Ruach addresses the peaks and valleys that hover around the subject of death in this mourning poem.

I have attempted to set this poem for the last five years with little or no success until now. The poem is highly emotional to me, which makes it complicated and sometimes viscerally painful to work with the text and harmonies.

Because the text of Ruach is so close and important to me personally, as I work with it, the emotional aspect of the piece really takes over the technical and other aspects. When I hear the sound of the Baroque violin, or the viola da gamba, I feel the flesh of melody. The poem itself describes the bone of highway and boot heels melting in the rubble of 9/11. Spades ripping. Visceral, terrifying images, founded on the brickwork of beautiful words. A great place to begin this composition's journey.

RUACH is a composition whose painful amalgam of words and music works hard to justify each text phrase with bursts of music that paint canvases of meaning. With "Mickey-Mousing" largely absent, these canvases bring the technical and emotional aspects of 'wind' and 'death' into visceral and intellectual realms of understanding for the listener.

**Date:** April 30, 2007

**Time:** 12:30 pm

**Place:** Staller 3317

**Program:** Music Composition

**Dissertation Advisor:** Peter Winkler