



University of North Texas  
College of Music

Master's Recital | Sunday, March 1, 2026 | 8:00 p.m. | Paul Voertman Concert Hall

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**Noah Salem, composer**

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Ruhaniya (2026) (روحانية) ..... Noah Salem  
Prologue (b. 2002)  
I: Stillness  
II: Repentance  
III: Sacrifice  
Interlude: Litany of Peace  
IV: Submitting  
V: Suffering / Lamentations  
VI: Theosis  
Epilogue

Ryan Fillinger, conductor

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*Program three hundred twenty-seven of the 2025–2026 season  
Photography and videography are prohibited*

## Program Notes

RUHANIYA (روحانية) is a Thesis project based on the Arabic word "ruhaniya," meaning "spirituality," with the root of the word (ruh) translating to "soul" or "spirit." This piece aims to create a musical representation of one's journey to inner soulfulness.

Though *Ruhaniya* was written through the lens of Eastern Orthodox ideology, the piece itself is left open to be interpreted by the audience and performers in whatever way they choose, in either a religious or non-religious context. In all tradition, *ruhaniya* represents a journey of self-discovery and self-transcendence; a quest to find the ultimate beauty and truth of the material world.

The inspiration for the piece is deeply rooted in some of the ideologies of Eastern Orthodoxy, and is a reflection on the music of Byzantine and Arabic traditions. Integral to the concept behind the piece is the idea of inner stillness (*hesychasm* in Greek), meditation, prayer, or self-reflection. Each movement represents a different step in that journey, and is touched upon below.

Musically, the piece combines traditions of Byzantine Chant (including both quotations of traditional melodies and newly-composed adaptations of its systems) with my chamber writing compositional voice. The result is an amalgamation of my harmonic language, timbral exploration, and musical structure with melodies of (and melodies inspired by) Byzantine musical traditions.

*Ruhaniya* consists of six movements of chamber ensemble or choir, separated by a Prologue, Interlude, and Epilogue for solo violin and drone. The interlude splits the piece into halves, each with a different conceptual background, based upon two events in the Eastern Orthodox church, both of which take place during the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Part I consists of the Prologue and Movements I-III, representing Jesus' night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

### Prologue

The Prologue provides the main melodic idea of the entire work, the *Ruhaniya* theme. It is a newly-composed melody based on Byzantine Tone 5, with the solo violin and drone imitating the practice of chant.

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### **Movement I: Stillness**

"Stillness" is based on the concept of *hesychasm*, a practice of inner meditation and silence, derived from the Greek *hesychia* meaning "stillness" or "quietude." The movement explores timbre and slowly evolving harmony, interspersed with moments of silence and reflection. The movement introduces two more important motifs for the work. Firstly, the *stillness* theme: a slow-moving expanding melody and harmony commonly played on the handbells. Secondly, the theosis theme, a melody based on Byzantine Tone 7. This movement reflects the Eastern Orthodox story where Jesus spent all night in a contemplative prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to his Passion.

### **Movement II: Repentance**

Central to the concept of *hesychasm* in Eastern Orthodoxy, as explored in Movement I, is the repetition of the Jesus Prayer: "O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner." While that text isn't physically present in the movement, it is deeply embedded in it, in that the music is built around a musical translation of the text. Each letter in the prayer is mapped to its respective musical note (A-G, then starting again where H = A, I = B, etc.) to comprise a 46-note tone row. Each instrument is given the row and must play it through at least once before moving on to non-row related material. The piece is an expansion of meditation, with the music freely floating and being conceived linearly, the harmonic content being a result of rhythmic displacement.

### **Movement III: Sacrifice**

This movement recontextualizes Byzantine Tone 5 by incorporating it into harmony and counterpoint. It explores the concept of inner tension and relief, reflecting on the ending of the night in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus sacrifices himself, surrendering to the Romans to endure torture and crucifixion.

### **Interlude: Litany of Peace**

In an Eastern Orthodox liturgy, we offer a number of litanies, which are series of petitions for prayer, typically followed by the response "Lord, have mercy." This interlude is composed in the form of a litany based on Byzantine Tone 6, where each phrase the violin plays acts as a petition, getting longer each time until the climax. The last three notes of every petition are the same structurally, representing the litany responses.

Part II of *Ruhaniya* consists of Movements IV-VI and the Epilogue, and represent the night of Jesus' crucifixion.

## **Movement IV: Submitting**

This movement is written to the text of the "Hymn of St. Simeon," a prayer spoken by Simeon, a devout man who was told that he would not die until he beheld the Messiah. After Jesus' birth, he was presented to Simeon, who beheld him and spoke the words of the prayer before passing soon after:

"Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of Thy people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people, Israel."

This movement represents that submission, the same submission that Jesus experienced during His Passion. The piece opens with a portion of a prayer used in the Vespers service: the plea "O Lord I have cried out unto Thee, hear thou me." The movement utilizes Byzantine Tone 7.

## **Movement V: Suffering / Lamentations**

Suffering/Lamentations is the most dissonant and sound-mass movement of the piece, representing the suffering that Jesus endured through his tortures and crucifixion. The piece utilizes Byzantine Tones 2 and 6 almost exclusively throughout. The Bassoon enters the work here to represent this suffering, starting by playing the *Ruhaniya* theme which has been translated to Tone 6. Amidst the dissonance and texture, three melodies emerge: the three Lamentations sung in the Eastern Orthodox Lamentations service on the evening of Good Friday; the songs offered at the funeral service for Christ. The first two are traditional melodies in Tone 5, while the third is a traditional melody in Tone 3. These Lamentations are sung every year throughout the world in different languages. The piece ends with a beautiful resolution to the tension; a promise that no matter what darkness has been endured, there always remains light.

## **Movement VI: Theosis**

The final movement represents the culmination of the journey of the listener. In the religious context, it represents the idea of theosis, or the unification of your soul with the divine. In a non-religious context, it is the achievement of inner stillness and reflection. The movement utilizes all motifs from the piece (the *Ruhaniya*, Stillness, Repentance, and Theosis) themes, with the latter being the most developed throughout. The movement also explores a faster Tone 5 section, climaxing on the full statement of the Theosis theme in Tone 7.

## **Epilogue**

The Epilogue is a recontextualization of the *Ruhaniya* theme, directly mirroring the Prologue.

## Biography

**Noah Salem (b. 2002)** is a media and concert composer based in Fort Worth, TX. Noah received a BM in Music Composition from the University of North Texas in 2020, and is studying towards his MA in Music Composition. He has a deep interest in creating unique soundworlds both acoustically and electronically, combining many different influences from Romantic-era orchestral works and film scores to electronic and contemporary works. Noah is equally interested in writing concert works and music for media, pursuing a career in writing music for films and television

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## Personnel

### Violin 1

Luca Buongiorno-Nardelli

### Violin 2

Annie Smith

### Viola

Margot Elder

### Cello

Deohanz Buenafe

### Bass

Camryn Lafargue

### Flute

Emma Weishalla

### Oboe

Ava Raymond

### Clarinet

Megan Dewalt

### Bassoon

Anthony Jordan

### Percussion

Tanner Easterling

Joseph Woodburn

### Piano

Kahan Taraporevala

### Harp

Zoë Winn

### Soprano

Rebecca Lang

Ellyse Joseph

Kaitlyn Rivera

Cadence Jansen

### Alto

Abigail Lewis

Sarah Talmage

Sassy Stambush

### Tenor

Ethan Hexter

Arthur Keast

Noah Salem

Kahan

Taraporevala

### Bass

Collin Huffman

Milo Warrior

PJ Mooney