

TIDE QUARTET Sebastian Adams (2020)

string quartet (2 violins viola cello)

duration: c. 1 – 2 hours

written for Kirkos

first performance by: Jane Hackett, Cillian O Breachain, Sebastian Adams, Yseult Cooper Stockdale;
as part of Kirkos Biosphere, September 2020

Equipment required:

4 Junk instruments (which will be extensively damaged during performance)

4 identical chairs

assorted bow modifications to allow underwater performance (to be created by the players)

Optional but recommended: 4 wetsuits or 4 drysuits

weights may be necessary to keep the chairs and cello from floating.

Amplification:

In the original performance, the piece will be performed unamplified.

However, it could be extremely interesting to amplify the performers with hydrophone contact mics attached to the bodies of the instruments (so that the sound doesn't disappear once underwater, and hopefully so that the sounds of the sea are emphasised).

The decision was made not to amplify mostly in order to preserve the natural sound-bed as an important sonic element in the piece.

Scenario / Performance Guidelines:

The initial version of this piece **must** be performed on the sea bed.

The performance should begin on dry land (or at most with water 2 inches deep).

Performers sit on chairs, which should be identical and should be in place before the start of the performance. [Instruments may also be set in place.] The music should be played off by heart, with no sheet music.

The performance ends when the tallest member of the ensemble is immersed in water up to neck height (while sitting). Each member of the ensemble should wade ashore once the water reaches their neck; they should disappear out of view of the audience before leaving performance mode.

Wet or dry suits can be used in order to keep the performers comfortable.

The performance should be supervised by a trained assistant, and all performers should feel free to exit the performance situation at any time if they feel unsafe.

The piece should not be performed in dangerous weather conditions.

The performance location should be chosen with regard to (a) the speed of tidal movement (please contact the composer for advice on this) and (b) for its suitability as a performance location. Ideally the site should be similar to a traditional concert hall: the performers should face the shore and the audience should be able to sit comfortably while facing the musicians. The piece is designed to be able to last as long as is necessary for the tide to rise sufficiently, but the ideal performance length is seen to be 1 – 1.5 hours.

After the performance, the instruments should be left in a safe place to dry, and then should be repaired using driftwood and flotsam.

After a certain point, the instruments and bows will cease to function. Performers should attempt to continue playing the piece as normal after this. The struggle to produce sound after this point should not be “performed” or hammed up. It is probably best to take a passive approach to the encroaching ocean and try to ignore its effects. If it’s necessary to fight against the tide, this should be a real attempt to resist, not an acted one. The approach to the piece and the situation should be serious and dignified, with no comedy (unless it arises naturally).

New instrumental techniques could be introduced once the bow is saturated – but again, these should be a serious way to attempt to play the instrument, rather than a slapstick response to the situation.

A second version of this piece can be constructed for use in concert, but it should include audio/video material from the initial version and it should be performed using the previously used (and recovered instruments).

Structure:

The structure of the piece is modelled after Georg Friedrich Haas' String Quartet No. 3, although it differs in some respects.

The formal structure of the piece and the detail of the music are largely left to the responsibility of the interpreters.

[The piece begins with the INTRODUCTION and then continues to the THEME]

The piece begins with a playthrough of the THEME.

There is no musical ending to the piece, rather it ends simply when the tide is too high. In conceptual terms, the musical material can be thought of as an endless cycle, over which the forces of the tide are superimposed.

After the initial performance of the THEME, the lettered Variations A to QQQQ?? are introduced, beginning with A and then in any order. The lettered Variations can be begun and/or played any number of times (with specific exceptions).

Each Variation begins with a characteristic "Invitation", which is played by one instrument. Each Variation also describes the way to accept this invitation. If a second instrument accepts an invitation to a particular Variation, the remaining instruments must join that Variation. If no instrument accepts the invitation, all players continue as they were until one player attempts a new Invitation.

The exception to the above statement comes with Variations which can be played as Duo or Solo. In these cases, the remaining players should NOT join in after an invitation is accepted. Players performing a Duo or Solo Variation must exit it if an accepted invitation to another Variation occurs.

Unless specified, every Variation can be escaped (by offering an invitation to another Variation) at any stage after the point all four instruments have joined in.

Most invitations should be ignored (approx. every 1 in 3 to 1 in 8 should be accepted). Contests between different invitations are possible.

At regular but distant intervals, the THEME should be played again (perhaps after 6 – 8 successful Variations – or as feels right). Invitations to the THEME should not be attempted until enough time has passed since the last THEME.

Mistakes will surely occur, and can be considered part of the interaction of the piece's framework, as long as performers are trying in good faith to follow the system properly.

The ambience of the performance situation is central to the sonic and visual landscape of the piece.

There should be many silences, long and short, and places where all four musicians fall silent should be savoured.

The first step in rehearsing the piece should, ideally, be to play the slow movement of Schubert's D minor String Quartet Death and the Maiden once through, with no discussion afterwards.

THEME

Slow - Tempo Not Remotely Strict

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 48$

emerge slowly from nothing - make your sound as imperceptible for as long as you dare, and at the peak of volume, your sound should sit within the violin sound.

Violoncello

Notated rhythms in this melody are a guide only to relative duration of notes [i.e. a crotchet beside a minim should be shorter than the minim. It does NOT need to be the same length as a crotchet a few notes later].

The first part of the theme (above) is always played by the cello.

The other instruments play a repeated pure major third on low A and C# (violins split the chord) with rhythm $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ or $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ or similar [any uneven, pulsing rhythm], altering rhythm and speed freely, and without respect to any meter. ensure a resonant and undying sound, blending the attack of each note with the death of the previous one. Always piano. At first, the three instruments should be in rhythmic unison, but then they can drift out of time. Rhythm between cello and other instruments should not be coordinated. Violin/viola can drop out individually as they wish, and cello can take breaks between phrases.

Do not time your notes with cello crotchets

passionate

rhythm approximate - even notes, marked articulation

keep repeating

Then part two of the theme is played:

Part two of the theme is something along these lines, and should dissipate very quickly and without drama. Players then return to an A major chord ($\text{♩} \text{♩}$ or $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ or similar). At this point, invitations to A are possible.

Subsequent episodes of the THEME:

When the theme is played again, it should never be complete, and it can be fractured, with phrases pulled from different parts of it. The high instruments never get to play the first part of the theme. In later versions, the other instruments can depart from their script: they may begin by using other rhythms or figuration, and eventually they can improvise freely (preferably on the noisy side of the spectrum rather than the melodic side). Always stay quiet.

Invitation: **cello begins**; Acceptance: **another player joins with the accompaniment**.

A – GRAINY IMITATION

Invitation:

Subtly mimic a sound you have just heard in the environment. The sound you make should be heard as a reverberation or consequence of the naturally occurring sound, not as an answering gesture. Use GRAINY SOUNDS

Acceptance:

In the same manner, imitate a second sound from the environment.

Continuation:

Remaining instruments join as quickly as possible.

Performers can continue with the same sound, or they can pick a new sound from the environment and mimic that in the same way.

The sustain of the sound can be extended limitlessly (if you wish), but it shouldn't be heard as a renewed gesture.

After a while, the performers can focus less on mimicking sounds from the environment and instead focus on the interactions between one another's sounds. At this point, definite gestures are allowed. But the dynamic should always stay subtle.

Almost never: one performer could directly imitate a sound they hear, in a more gesture-driven way. This should be loud and abrasive for a split-second, before fading quickly till it's inaudible. This should happen at most once or twice in each realisation of **A**.

GRAINY SOUNDS: should not have much pitch material. No directions are given as to how to achieve the sound as there are so many possible ways. Other ways to describe the desired sound could be noisy, creaky, unstable. But always be careful to avoid definite attacks or gestures.

B – CLASHING OVERTONE THIRDS

Invitation:

Any major third (tuned purely), played with a short note accented and then a held note, sustaining and tapering away. Repeat this gesture on the same pitches. Dynamic range *p – mf*

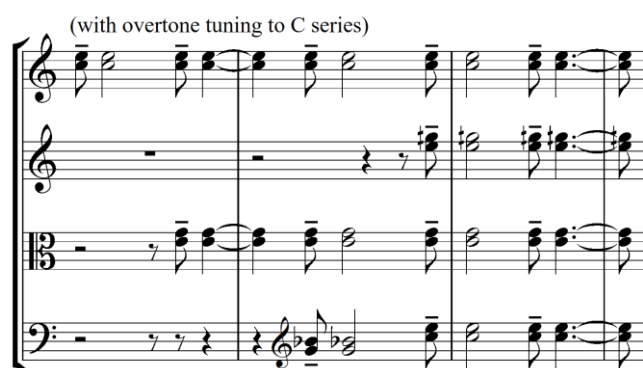
Acceptance:

A second player joins, using another third (major or minor) from the same overtone series. They should coordinate with the first player, playing in rhythmic unison.

Continuation:

The remaining players join, stacking further thirds on top.

e.g.



The chords introduced may be from any part of the overtone series.

Players repeat their chord, always in rhythmic unison.

Alternatives:

- 1) After all players have joined in, players can change the notes of their chord (staying within the same overtone series). Now, other close intervals from the overtone series are also allowed.
- 2) A player can choose to disrupt the material by inviting a major third from another overtone series. This should be performed out of time. The acceptance of this alteration comes by gradually adjusting to the newly proposed timing and chord.

N.B. if there is uncertainty over the chosen overtone series, whichever one has been interpreted as being correct by the players who join last will be deemed correct, even if it was not the one intended by the first player.

C – PULSING CHORDS

Invitation:

Cello must start. Very Slow. Always in rhythm ♩ ♪ [tbc]

Play a fundamental note (low on your instrument), with a pulsing quality.

for sound quality, think Bruckner 8 slow movement, opening

Acceptance:

A second instrument joins the chord (in rhythmic unison), playing another chord note (in pure tuning).

Continuation:

The other players join soon after, filling in the chord (7ths etc. are allowed).

Eventually, drift out of time with one another (do not force this).

Alternative: A player can choose to speed up or slow down (never rising in volume). If the other players do not follow them, the player returns to the original speed.

D – CASCADE OF APPOGGIATURAS

Invitation:

A falling appoggiatura

Acceptance:

An appoggiatura a little higher or lower (p to mf)

Continuation:

If a higher arpeggio was chosen, third player should play a lower one (and vice versa).

After this, continue in both directions (pattern not important), arching ever outwards in pitch.

Get faster and more intense. (louder also)

Eventually, stop getting higher and lower but stick in roughly the same pitch area. Allow quartertone intervals to creep in, and gradually get very quiet, always staying as fast as possible.



e.g.

[octave differences can be allowed. I think]

E – GHOSTLY RISING THIRDS

[DUO]

Invitation:

A third (major or minor) doublestop with weak/ghostly sound

Acceptance:

A third higher, same sound

Continuation:

**Continue the chain, always going higher, continuing beyond the useful register of the instrument.
Try to create interesting ghostly sounds even in the highest part of the instrument.**

Try to maintain some sense of tonality, treating the invitation chord as a key area.

Two duos can play E simultaneously, but should attempt to play it in different keys. The duos can be any pair.

The two players not in the duo can continue the previously played Variation, or they can play a Solo section, or they can attempt to invite the other players to new Variations.

F – UNISON WITH GLISSANDO INVITATIONS

Invitation:

A sustained note in a register that can be played in a low position by all instruments (i.e. not lower than G below middle C; not higher than E open string on violin) 1. Pianissimo.

Acceptance:

Play the same note pianissimo.

The remaining players join too. Occasionally, the volume of this Variation could be raised to piano (after the invitation).

Every so often, a player veers off pitch with a glissando to a new pitch for a few seconds.

If another player follows them, a period of chaos ensues: all players suggest new notes (reaching them by glissando); once a second player accepts a note given by another player, the remaining players join and the Variation stabilises.

Tiny microvariations in tuning can be used every so often. If an intentional microvariation in tuning occurs, all players should crescendo and diminuendo together several times before settling back into tune.

– PITCHED IMITATION

Invitation:

Subtly mimic a sound you have just heard in the environment, using the pitch you heard it at (or an octave transposition of it).

The sound you make should be heard as a reverberation or consequence of the naturally occurring sound, not as an answering gesture. As the imitation fades, it can be spun into other pitched material in keeping with the context (no obvious tonal melodies, unless connected with the other pitch material of the piece), **or it can simply fade.**

Acceptance:

In the same manner, imitate a second sound from the environment.

Continuation:

Remaining instruments join as quickly as possible.

Performers can continue with the same sound, or they can pick a new sound from the environment and mimic that in the same way.

The sustain of the sound can be extended limitlessly (if you wish), but it shouldn't be heard as a renewed gesture.

After a while, the performers can focus less on mimicking sounds from the environment and instead focus on the interactions between one another's sounds, mimicking and supporting one another. At this point, definite gestures are allowed. But the dynamic should always stay subtle.

– PIZZICATO CANONS

Invitation:

An unhurried, deliberate pizzicato tune, as if picking up a Palestrina choral piece somewhere in the middle. mp

Acceptance:

An imitation (ideally an exact canon at any pitch) of this tune by another player

The remaining players join, with each choosing a slower speed to play the canon at.

Once you can no longer follow the canon perfectly, try to catch most of it without leaving gaps, or else make something up that seems to fit.

Sometimes, a player can begin to speed up the speed they are playing the canon at. If this happens, all players should also speed up, and should twist the contour of the melody into an upward motif which builds in intensity until all are playing, high, loud, discordant, all the time. There is no way to back out of this process other than escaping from the Variation into another.

🎵 – Wet Bow Effects

[tbc]

Preparation: Choose a material or two to attach to your bow (or choose your own way to make the instrument playable when the bow is soaked). Make sure the material will not be physically comic, and aim for ideas which can produce beautiful sounds.

Don't prepare too much.

Invitation:

One player begins exploring their wet bow effects.

Acceptance:

A second player joins in.

After this, the remaining players join.

The sounds produced should seem a product of genuine exploration in the moment.

Be open to new things in the moment, and try to find new sounds and affects each time this Variation comes up.

Be careful that this is a sincere exploration and not an acted one (for example: it's not a "caveman discovers fire" situation).

Aim to provide space for the experimentation of the other musicians, and do not dominate the soundscape or attempt to grab the attention of the audience

🎵 – Bird Song

Invitation:

One player makes a sweet/delicate interpretation of bird song of some kind (examples: high, wispy harmonics; delicate trills etc. etc.)

Acceptance:

Another player joins in with their own (similar or different) bird interpretation

All players join in. After a short period of regular activity, each player begins to play less and less, leaving larger and longer silences.

As these silences get longer, switch your attention to actively listening for bird song in the environment.

Do not coordinate the silences: but do accept and relish total silence (from the quartet) when it occurs.

If wished, you can begin to mimic the bird song you actually hear. But really, the point of this variation is to gradually remove the musicians and leave as much space as possible for the environment: what you play is not so important.

It would be interesting, once during the piece, to take this to extreme lengths, if it feels like it works in the moment.

🎵 – Death and the Maiden

Invitation:



(by one player). pp

Acceptance:

play the same motif after a silence.

Continuation:

The remaining players each play this motif once. Then a long silence. Then play the following chorale together.

This should happen only once in the whole piece, in the few minutes before the cello becomes totally unplayable. The invitation can happen (unsuccessfully) more than once, but never until the cello is almost unplayable.

Andante con moto.

First system of a musical score in B-flat major, 4/4 time. The tempo is 'Andante con moto.' The dynamics are marked 'pp' (pianissimo) for all four staves. The music features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass and a more melodic line in the treble, with some chromatic movement and ties.

Second system of the musical score. The dynamics are marked 'f' (forte) for the first half and 'decresc.' (decrescendo) for the second half. The music continues with the same accompaniment pattern, showing a clear crescendo and decrescendo in the upper staves.

Third system of the musical score. The dynamics are marked 'p' (piano) and 'pp' (pianissimo) for the first half, and 'cresc.' (crescendo) for the second half. The music concludes with a final flourish in the treble staves, marked with a fermata and a final 'p' (piano) dynamic.

M – Stretch

[Solo]

Stretch the THEME out extreeeeemely slowly. Play with a non-vibrato, plain sound without emphasis on any notes. The theme should be so slow that it should be difficult or impossible to recognise. You can start anywhere and play a fragment or a huge section.

No invitation or acceptance.

N.B. If another Variation is successfully started, you should quite playing solo and join in.

N – Knocking and Brushing

[can be played as a quartet or as a duo or trio]

Invitation:

Knock or brush on the instrument. Try to do it in a way that creates an interesting sound that could be repeated for a long time with subtle variations. *p* to *mf*

Acceptance:

Another player joins. If the first player knocked, you should brush. Try to create an interplay

Continuation:

If pitched sounds are still possible, the third player joins with a high pitched, quiet note (one note only).


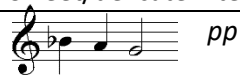
The fourth player (if they join) can choose a knock, brush or high note.

After this point, each player must swap between the three types of material each time they complete a gesture. (The gestures can be short or long, and can be separated by silence).

The momentum of the section can ebb and flow naturally (i.e. it could stay in one intensity, build to a climax or dissipate into silence)

If pitched sounds with the bow are no longer possible for a third player, this section MUST be played as a duo.

SUMMARY of Invitations

THEME	Cello begins theme
A – GRAINY IMITATION	Subtly mimic a sound (grainy)
B – CLASHING OVERTONE THIRDS	Any major third; short note accented and then a held note, sustaining and tapering away.
C – PULSING CHORDS	Cello plays a pulsing fundamental; 
D – CASCADE OF APPOGGIATURAS	A falling appoggiatura
E – GHOSTLY RISING THIRDS [duo]	A third (major or minor) doublestop with weak/ghostly sound
F – UNISON WITH GLISSANDO INVITATIONS	A sustained note in a register that can be played in a low position by all instruments (pp)
G – PITCHED IMITATION	Subtly mimic a sound (at pitch)
H – PIZZICATO CANONS	An unhurried, deliberate pizzicato tune (canon theme)
J – Wet Bow Effects	Begin exploring wet bow effects
K – Bird Song	Sweet/delicate interpretation of bird song
L – Death and the Maiden	
M – Stretch [solo]	Stretch the theme
N – Knocking and Brushing [duo, trio or quart]	Knock or brush

[I feel one more section, perhaps a more elaborate pitched one – like the Wyschnegradsky chords in Haas... - could be a good idea]

[Please let me know if I have left out important information or made any mistakes!!]