

# Study Guide for Derek Charke's *Song of the Tides*

Wesley Ferreira

## Unit 1: Composer

Derek Charke is currently an Assistant Professor of Music Theory and Composition at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, and an associate of the Canadian Music Centre. Born in Fredericton (NB), Charke earned a Ph.D. in composition and a Master's degree in Flute Performance at SUNY Buffalo, a Master's in Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London (UK), and a Bachelor's degree in composition at the University of North Texas. He also attended the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, Netherlands.

Charke has received numerous awards and commissions from ensembles including the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Nova Scotia, the Kronos Quartet, and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. His music has been heard throughout North America and Europe, and also in South America.

Many of Charke's recent compositions pair electro-acoustic elements, many derived from environmental sounds, with acoustic instruments. His music bridges the gap between natural sounds and the western "classical" tradition, also incorporating contemporary and popular influences. Charke has composed three works for wind band. (For more information on the composer, visit his Web site: [www.charke.com](http://www.charke.com).)

## Unit 2: Composition

*Song of the Tides* was composed in 2006 for Mark Hopkins and the Acadia University Wind Ensemble, with assistance from the Canadian Music Centre and other agencies. Written for wind band and sounds pre-recorded from the Bay of Fundy and Nova Scotia's South Shore, the work consists of two movements, entitled "Low Tide" and "High Tide." The movements may be performed independently, but the complete work lasts approximately 10 minutes. In each movement, one performer is assigned to play the pre-recorded sounds via CD player or laptop computer. Written with junior high-school musicians in mind, it has been performed by high-school and university bands, as well as community ensembles. Its level of difficulty is at a minimum Grade Three.

## Unit 3: Historical Perspective

Aleatoric music is music in which either the compositional process or the method of performance is determined by chance elements. The term often refers to pieces that give the performer certain liberties with regard to the performance. Made popular by post-World War II composers Boulez, Schaeffer, Lutoslawski, Cage, and Stockhausen, use of aleatory in wind-band writing began to appear occasionally in works of the 1960s. Since that time, composers such as Michael Colgrass, Ron Nelson, Joseph Schwantner, and a growing number of the newest generation have used aleatoric effects in wind-band repertoire.

The use of acousmatic soundscapes in conjunction with "traditional" band writing, as in *Song of the Tides*, is a novel concept in contemporary wind-band literature. Solo repertoire with electronic elements has been part of concert performances for well over fifty years; use of electronics with wind bands has only recently begun to gain popularity.

With the advent of reliable software and hardware, the merging of electronics and acoustic instruments is natural. As computers have become increasingly important to the composition process and to our daily lives, the incorporation of *musique concrète* allows a band director or teacher to integrate technology in the formative years of musical studies.

Between his natural inclination towards the environment and acquiring the skills to work the necessary software programs, the composer Derek Charke believes that it was inevitable that he started capturing natural sounds and pairing them with acoustic instruments. He has been exploring the use of such combinations since 2004. Prior to this, his compositional output was specifically for acoustic instruments, though he used themes based on natural events.

## Units 4 and 5: Form, Structure, and Musical Elements

The first movement, "Low Tide," is best described as group improvisation over a soundtrack. Performers are asked to listen to the soundtrack that accompanies the movement, and to discover ways in which to imitate these sounds on their instruments. Charke offers a variety of performance options.

Figure 1: First page of score of "High Tide," movement 2 of Derek Charke's *Song of the Tides*.

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Several performers (3-8) can be selected as soloists and positioned in one of three ways:

- within the ensemble
- at the front of the stage
- in different parts of the hall

Alternatively, the entire ensemble may participate.

The pre-recorded soundtrack for this movement is 4 minutes, 43 seconds in length and plays continuously. It includes the sounds of wind, water, foghorns, small birds, seagulls, and the tide roaring through the entrance to the Minas Basin at the tip of Cape Split (NS). Percussionists are encouraged to use non-pitched bells (e.g., a ship's bell), and other "found" objects or instruments that can imitate marine sounds. Performers are at liberty to experiment in a sort of free improvisation.

The second movement, "High Tide," uses traditional music notation, and introduces extended techniques appropriate for younger players, including *glissandi*, aeolian (air and breath) sounds, and aleatoric gestures. The main body of the movement consists of pandiatonic harmony and melody combined with acousmatic soundscapes. The soundtrack plays only intermittently during this movement.

"High Tide" can be broken down into the following sections: Intro-A-B-A1-C-D-A2-Coda. Sections are so derived from the presence of motives x, y, and z, as well as distinct musical indications and material.

The introduction is an aleatoric section without time signature. Lasting thirty-five seconds, conductors can follow the CD waveform provided on the bottom staff of the score to determine the amount of time that has elapsed. The movement opens with the sound of a foghorn, and Flute 1 and Percussion playing on the downbeat. Flutes 1, 2 and 3 have staggered entrances, which may be cued freely by the conductor or structured at regular intervals. Flutists repeat the gesture (lip glissandi down and back up to their initial note) independent from the conductor, and do not co-ordinate with other players. This is repeated at a consistent tempo of quarter note = 76 until they fade out with the soundtrack at measure 1. The percussionists, playing the glockenspiel and two non-pitched bell sounds, are asked to play independently of the conductor, and to co-ordinate strikes at an approximate rate of eight to ten total hits from the beginning of the movement until measure 1.

Section A (bars 1-27) begins in the key of F, 4/4 meter, and at a tempo marking of quarter note = 76. The clarinet section enters with the initial melodic phrase and statement of motive x (Figure 2), while the saxophone section takes up the glissando gesture as the flutes fade out. The clarinet, flute, and saxophone sections alternate playing the six-measure melodic phrase and glissando gesture until the end of the section. In the final six measures of section A, Trumpet 1 joins the flutes and clarinets in playing the initial melodic phrase.



Figure 2: Motive x from "High Tide."

Section B (mm. 28-38) is marked by a return of the soundtrack and a slower tempo, quarter note = 69. The brass section, which previously played an accompanying role, comes to the foreground with a new theme. The texture is transparent with chordal movement in half-notes, and a four-measure phrase led by Trumpet 1 mimics the rise and fall of the waves. After a symmetrical period, the third statement of the phrase is shortened and leads to a cadential structure and a sense of suspension highlighted by a *fermata*.

Section A1 (mm. 39-46) marks the return of the glissando gesture played by flutes and clarinets, alongside the initial melodic phrase containing motive x, here performed by the horns and trombones. This presentation of section A material is truncated. The soundtrack fades out three measures into this section.

Section C (mm. 47-64) is divided into two nine-bar phrases and contains the first appearance of motive y (Figure 3). Similar to motive x but with an ascending final note, Charke uses motive y to give the impression of forward motion. He uses motive y and x against each other in a call and response between the trumpets and low brass.



Figure 3: Motive y from "High Tide."

This antiphonal segment, together with a crescendo in all parts, creates a great sense of anticipation leading to the climax of the phrase and the first *forte* dynamic of the work. This is also the first time the entire ensemble performs together for an extended period. Less rhythmic activity follows the climax, and a two-measure *decrescendo* quickly releases energy. This is neither the first nor the last time in the work where rhythm and dynamic indications are used to depict the rise and fall of the tides.

The second nine-measure phrase of section C is in 3/4 meter. The percussionists are asked to play in measured rhythm for the first time, and motive y is used exclusively. Call and response figures among various instrumental groups, *crescendo* and *accelerando* indications in all parts, as well as ascending statements and rhythmic diminution of motive y create momentum towards a definitive arrival of the climax of the work in measure 65.

Section D (mm. 65-80) is unique in many ways. The 4/4 meter has returned, and the arrival of the climax is made clear by the *fortissimo* indication and conclusion of the *accelerando* by way of a new tempo marking of quarter note = 96+. The sixteen measures of this section are divided into two symmetrical periods. Charke first introduces motive z (Figure 4) in both its original form and inversion only a few measures before the arrival of Section D where this motive is used repeatedly. The theme introduced in Section B returns prominently, though altered.

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Figure 4: Motive z from “High Tide.”

The saxophone and trumpet parts indicate the playing of *bell tones*, and one part is written a full beat later in syncopation to the original, adding punctuation and helping to establish a strong rhythmic feel. For good measure, Charke reintroduces motive x to the texture after five measures, but only after a decrescendo in the band eight bars later does the familiar motive come through. Following the climax at measure 65, the texture, dynamic level, and rhythmic activity gradually subside. A *ritardando* in the final two measures of the section brings us back to the opening tempo and to the arrival of a new section.

At Section A<sup>2</sup> (mm. 81-88), the soundtrack returns and the percussion are again asked to co-ordinate their strikes, but to play independently of the conductor. Charke introduces additional extended techniques and effects here, which include aeolian sounds in the flutes, audible breathing from the clarinet section, and light bell tapping in the horn and baritone parts. The glockenspiel plays the final statement of motive x.

The final section of the work (bars 89-96) may be considered a coda, and is signaled in the soundtrack by the foghorn. Devoid of any familiar themes or motives, the remaining eight measures of the work consist of a gradual *ritardando* and a continuation of the extended techniques introduced in the previous section. The second movement ends with the simultaneous exhalation of breath from musicians and the fading out of the soundtrack.

### Units 6 and 7: Stylistic, Technical, and Interpretive Considerations

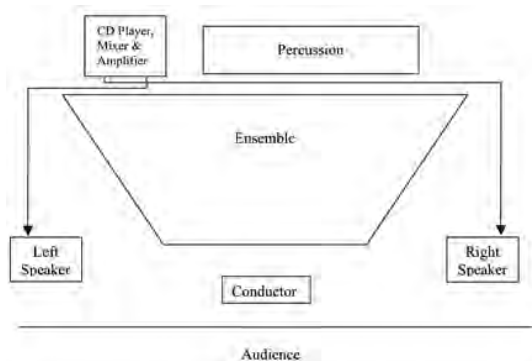


Figure 5. Diagram showing the disposition of the ensemble and the electronic components for Charke's *Song of the Tides*.

*Song of the Tides* is an accessible work that offers some challenges to both ensemble and conductor. Consideration must be given to the overall balance of the ensemble with the pre-recorded sounds from the speakers, particularly in the context of the performance space. The audio part should blend with the ensemble and not dominate. Alternatively, it must not get buried. The person operating the CD player or laptop should ideally follow the score and have good sight-lines to the conductor so as to begin each audio track at the right time.

There are few rhythmic challenges in the work; only the occasional metre change from 4/4 to 3/4 may catch young musicians off guard. Instrument ranges have deliberately been left in the easier *tessituras*, and melodic lines are fairly conjunct. This presents an opportunity for the conductor to work with the ensemble on intonation and blend. The use of dynamics to emulate the rise of fall of the tides is obvious and should be rehearsed to achieve maximum impact in performance, particularly the contrast between “hairpins” within a measure and extended *crescendi* and *diminuendi* over several measures.

For the conductor, adhering to the correct *tempi* in the second movement of the work presents the greatest challenge. The musicians must be prepared to move with the conductor so the ensemble can co-ordinate with the soundtrack. Charke provides a waveform along the bottom of the score for cues, as well as a second-by-second indicator. The conductor may also wish to use a timer on the podium.

This piece provides ample opportunity for student involvement and engagement. The first movement is designed as workshop material that can be extracted and used by band directors for teaching or for a class project. Students are asked to listen to the soundtrack that accompanies this movement, and explore ways to imitate these sounds on their instruments. Another option allows the performers to discover ways to notate their sounds using graphic notation, and then to create a score.

The second movement calls for extended techniques that may be used as a teaching device aimed towards strengthening traditional performance practice. In this movement, almost all instruments are required to *glissando* down a step and return to the original pitch. This is an opportunity to address tuning in a novel way. Ideally, when the students return to the starting pitch, they should focus on “finding the pitch.” Aeolian and breath sounds, and blowing air in and out of the instrument at slow and regular intervals, serve as reminders of the importance of proper breathing and air support needed by wind players.

Charke does a fine job of providing written explanations in each instrumental part as to how musicians should perform the extended techniques. From the outset, directors may wish to create a take-home assignment where students are asked to decipher the instructions and experiment with ways in which to perform these techniques. Their ideas can be brought into the classroom and discussed. To facilitate this, Charke provides extensive program notes and performance instructions in the conductor's score.

### Unit 8: Suggested Listening Wind Band Works with Acousmatic Sound

Steven Bryant, *Ecstatic Waters*, University of North Texas, Eugene Corporon, conductor. Mark Records.

Steven Bryant, *Ecstatic Waters*, University of Texas, Jerry Junkin, conductor. <http://www.stevenbryant.com/ecstaticwaters.php>

Derek Charke, *Song of the Tides*, Acadia University, Mark Hopkins, conductor. <http://www.charke.com>

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Derek Charke, *Falling from Cloudless Skies*, Acadia University, Mark Hopkins, conductor. <http://www.charke.com>

### Unit 9: Further Resources

#### List of Aleatoric Band Music:

[http://www.virginiaallen.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/aleatoric\\_list.pdf](http://www.virginiaallen.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/aleatoric_list.pdf)

Example of Aleatoric Music: *In C* by Terry Riley

<http://www.flagmusic.com/content/clips/inc.pdf>

### APPENDIX A: Publisher Information

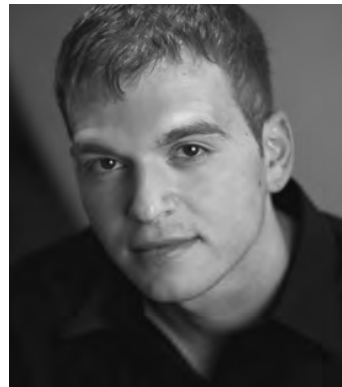
*Song of the Tides* is a self-published work available directly from the composer. Contact: [dcharke@gmail.com](mailto:dcharke@gmail.com)

Electronic version (includes a PDF score and parts, MP3 files for the soundtrack. A CD will be mailed on request): \$40

Printed version (includes 1 bound score, 1 set of parts, CD with soundtrack): \$60

Degree of Difficulty: Grade 3

Duration: 5:00 (1st mov't alone); 10:00 (1st & 2nd mov'ts)



### Wesley Ferreira

is Director of Bands and teaches single reeds at Mount Allison University. He also holds conducting positions at Southampton Summer Music and with the Portuguese Heritage Band Project, with which he has recorded two CDs, entitled *Across the Ocean: The Music of Bandas Filarmonicas* (2007, 2010). He was previously

the program administrator of the University of Western Ontario New Horizons Band program, and he currently serves as President of the Canadian Association of Bandas Filarmonicas. He is also active as a clarinet soloist, chamber musician, adjudicator, and clinician, and has performed in the U.S., China, and Portugal. Ferreira holds degrees from the University of Western Ontario and Arizona State University. For more information, visit his Web site: [www.wesleyferreira.com](http://www.wesleyferreira.com)

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