And we drown

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And we drown
for wind ensemble

by
Cara Haxo

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Date of Final Thesis Approval: 29 Apr 2015  Advisor:
Tritones, Minor Seconds, and Major Sevenths:

A Reflection and Analysis of *And we drown*

By Cara Haxo

I. Introduction

When I first set out to write my thesis a year ago, I imagined that it would be a work for orchestra and narrator who would recite the text of T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917). Needless to say, I quickly abandoned the idea of a narrator, both because I doubted I would be able to obtain the rights to the poem and because I did not want my thesis to be such a literal presentation of a poem that I so loved and admired. I kept the tentative title “And we drown”—the last three words of the poem—in the back of my mind. While I did not want to lock myself into a certain perspective right away, I liked the way in which the potential title subtly referred to the poem without forcing the listener to hear the piece with a specific narrative.

The switch from orchestra to wind ensemble happened some time later, after many sketches had been written and posted onto my bedroom wall. One night at dinner, one of my band-loving friends asked me when I was planning on writing a piece for wind ensemble. I brushed off his comment at the time, but the next time I sat down to compose, I reimagined some of my sketches for wind ensemble, and something clicked. My sketches came faster, my music had more of a direction, and my thesis started to become a single, cohesive piece. This is my first work for wind ensemble. My main instrument throughout high school and undergraduate studies was piano, I spent much of my time singing in choirs, and I listened to many chamber and orchestral works. “Band” pieces, however, were foreign to me. In working on my thesis, I sought not to write a
traditional "band" piece, but to explore this combination of sounds, timbres, and colors that is unique to the ensemble.

Several months later, I am pleased to present my thesis *And we drown* (2015), a nine-minute, single movement work for wind ensemble.

II. Compositional Process

My early sketches for *And we drown* were closely connected to portions of Eliot’s text. Rather than trying to capture the entire poem, I selected certain passages and sketched short musical ideas—a single melody, a handful of chords—based on my selections. These sketches ultimately became the foundation of my thesis, and while many of them evolved so completely that they no longer resemble their original form, a few of my initial sketches still exist in the completed thesis. In fact, the first few notes that I wrote are still present in the final product. These are based on the opening of Eliot’s poem: “Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky.”¹ I have always been attracted to these lines, and indeed, they were the first lines that I translated into music:

**Example 1: And we drown, mm. 58-59 (transposed)**

![Music notation](image)

This excerpt is, quite literally, my setting of the words “let us go then.” It returns throughout the work like a constant invitation to the listeners.

The starting point of many of the other prominent themes in the work comes from the following chord:

**Example 2: And we drown, early sketch**

Made up of two tritones separated by a perfect fourth, the set class of this is chord is (0167), and the interval class vector is [200022]. The prominence of IC1 in the tetrachord shows the its connection to the theme from Example 1, which is composed only of minor seconds, minor ninths, and major sevenths (all IC1). Indeed, the chord originally comes from a sketch of the “Let us go” theme in which I added a simple accompaniment. While I did not keep the sketch, I took the chord from the beginning of the accompaniment and manipulated it until it became its own motif. In the first half of my thesis, the chord becomes a dirge-like ostinato of alternating tritones:

**Example 3: And we drown, dirge motif (sounding)**

The original voicing of the chord occurs on the downbeat of the first measure. Afterwards, the two pairs of tritones become rhythmically independent of each other, moving with their own rhythms until they reunite at the start of the next statement of the ostinato (which occurs in the fourth measure, not shown in the above excerpt). This ostinato is the driving force of the first half of the work. While it is never the main theme,
it constantly builds on itself, becoming more aggressive with each repetition. It first appears in m. 37, slowly taking shape in the bass clarinet, bassoons, and contrabassoon; the steady, forceful rhythm begins in m. 41. In m. 48, the motif switches to the trombones and tubas, and in m. 63, the trumpets and euphonium join them. Although the instrumentation changes and the chords are sometimes revoiced, the pitch classes of the chords are rarely altered. Instead, the assertion of the C, F-sharp, F, and B creates a sense of foreboding and unease. This feeling is heightened by the slight increases in tempo that occur in mm. 48, 63, and 74. By steadily growing in instrumentation and increasing the tempo without changing the pitch classes, the dirge motif ultimately leads to the piece’s climax in mm. 94-100.

Although the mood of the piece changes after the climax, the new theme that is presented first in the flute still comes from the chord in Example 2:

**Example 4: And we drown, mm. 103-106**

The two tritones now overlap, but the first four notes still belong to the set class (0167). Furthermore, the last two measures are composed only of IC1, hinting back to the “Let us go then” theme from Example 1. The motif is melodic rather than harmonic and has been moved to a higher register. I composed this section based on the last stanza of Eliot’s poem:

I grow old... I grow old...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

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2 This is also the first time that the “Let us go” theme sounds; it is first played as a solo in the B-flat clarinet.
Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. 3

The second section of my thesis, when the theme from Example 4 is first presented,
evokes the ocean through its instrumentation: the woodwinds, crotales, piano, and
stopped horns all create a delicate, flowing aesthetic. Above all, the prevalence of the
harps and the contour of their melodic lines mimic the movement of waves. In my
performance notes, I note that the harps should be placed on opposite sides of the stage so
that they create a stereo effect. Knowing that they would be placed this way shaped the
way I composed for the instruments. While I often have the harps doubling each other so
that they can be heard, I occasionally desynchronize them so that they are one sixteenth
note apart, as in the following measures:

3 Eliot, 7.
Example 5: *And we drown*, mm. 106-107

This sort of harp “phasing” is meant to further create the image of the chambers of the sea. The two harps only ever stay out of sync for a handful of measures and always come back together. Thus, the harps themselves act like waves that sometimes crash in unison, but other times crash a split second apart from each other.

III. Form

On the large scale, *And we drown* is in two parts, with a forty-measure introduction. The following chart gives a broad overview of the different sections that occur in the piece:
The introduction is an extensive, single idea of trilling melodies alternating with chords played by the harp and woodwinds. The two main sections, meanwhile, can each be divided into smaller sub-sections. In the A section, the “Let us go then” melody from Example 1 and the dirge-like ostinato from Example 3 are stated over and over again. Each time they are stated, the instrumentation expands (such as the addition of the trumpets in m. 63) and the tempo picks up just slightly. In sub-section A, the tempo is quarter note equals 60, by A’, the quarter note equals 63, and by A”, the quarter note equals 66. Although such small changes in tempo might only be subconsciously perceived by audience members, the slight increase in tempo is meant to increase the tension of this section as it builds to its climax, which happens halfway through the piece at the end of the A section. Rather than decaying with materials we have already heard, an entirely new idea is introduced. The B section is unlike all that has come before it in many ways: we shift from simple to complex time, the harps take over, the orchestration thins, and a new melody is introduced in the flutes (see Example 4). The B section shifts between the new theme and harp accompaniment (those sub-sections marked with a B)
and short episodes that stray away from the harp ostinato. The second of these episodes (mm. 133-44) is a return of the “Let us go then” theme. Its appearance clearly refers back to the A section and creates a sense of cohesion between two otherwise different musical ideas. Cohesion between the two sections is further created by the recurrence of the dirge-like theme in B’’’ (m. 167). By pairing the harp ostinatos with the dirge theme that defined the A section, the listener is able to view the composition as a whole. Furthermore, when the harps break away from their ostinato beginning in m. 175, they revert back to their opening material from the introduction. In doing so, they allow the piece to end in a similar way to how it first started. By including references to the earlier sections within the B section, as well as by using the same pitch class sets, And we drown becomes a unified composition.

IV. Analysis

Eliot’s poem expresses uncertainty, internal conflict, and the fear of growing old. My composition captures these apprehensive emotions through the use of set classes that both oppose each other and, at times, morph in to one another, symbolizing the wanderings of the narrator’s mind. The set class (01267), of which (0167) is a subset, is established from the first chord:
Example 6: *And we drown*, mm. 1-3 (sounding)

This opening chord lays the foundation for the harmonic structure of the rest of the opening section. As the introduction continues, its main motifs are subsets of the original set class:

Example 7: *And we drown*, mm. 7-9 (transposed)

Comprised of only three separate pitch classes, the set class of this motif is (016). The “quasi-accelerating” motif is passed between the instruments—oboe in m. 10, English horn in m. 14, and so on—while maintaining the same set class. Interspersed with statements of the motif are rising figures in the harp, which are doubled by the woodwinds and are reminiscent of the opening chord. The majority of these figures, such as the first one in m. 13, belongs to set class (016):
Example 8: *And we drown*, mm. 12-14

The use of the accelerating (016) motif, paired with the recurring harp gestures belonging to the (0167) set class, creates a unified introduction that paves the way for the melodic and harmonic material that will occur not only in the introduction, but also throughout the rest of the piece.

Although the majority of the material used in the introduction comes from the set class of the opening chord, new ideas sneak into the texture. Such is the case in mm. 18-20, with the held notes in the bassoon and tenor saxophone parts:

Example 9: *And we drown*, mm. 18-20 (sounding)

The set class of this excerpt is (0268), which at first seems unrelated to the other opening material. However, a closer look at the interval class vectors for (0167) and (0268) ([200022] and [020202], respectively) will show that both set classes include two tritones and no minor thirds or major sixths. Moreover, while the tetrachords do not share any other interval classes in common—(0167) uses interval classes 1 and 5 while (0268) uses interval classes 2 and 4—both tetrachords include two pairs of three different interval classes, and none of the other three interval classes. In addition, both tetrachords are
symmetrical. The intervals between the first two and last two notes of (0167) are minor seconds, while the intervals between the first two and last two notes of (0268) are major seconds. The (0268) set class becomes more prominent as the work continues and is ultimately the set class that ends the entire composition.

The dirge-like tritone ostinato that begins at rehearsal B (m. 41) is a combination of the (0167) and (0268) set classes. While I conceived of the chord vertically as two tritones stacked on top of each other (see my discussion above in Part II of this paper), resulting in a (0167) sonority, it is also possible to analyze the individual lines horizontally. In order to do so, we must group together the musical lines of the ostinato with identical rhythms. Thus, at m. 43, we must analyze the bass clarinet and contrabassoon together as one unit, and the two bassoons separately as a different unit. In doing so, we obtain the following two musical lines:

**Example 10a: And we drown, mm. 41-43 (sounding)**

![Bass Clarinet and Contrabassoon](image)

**Example 10b: And we drown, mm. 43-45**

![Bassoon](image)

Although the bass clarinet and contrabassoon duet in Example 10a remains a (0167) set class, the duet between the two bassoons belongs to set class (0268). Furthermore, when combined, these two duets not only form a (0167) tetrachord on the downbeat when they both first occur, but also a (0268) tetrachord when both parts shift to their higher notes.
The dirge-like theme therefore combines these two set classes. The two tetrachords constantly work together to maintain the ostinato, yet are also in opposition as they shift back and forth. This is symbolic of the indecision and internal conflict the narrator feels throughout Eliot’s poem.

The ostinato leads to the climax of the work in mm. 94-100. The chords played by the trumpets and trombones at rehearsal G vertically combine the (0167) and (0268) tetrachords, resulting in the symmetrical set class (012678) with interval class vector [420243]. The interval class vector highlights the prevalence of IC1, which is prominent not just in the climax but also throughout the entire work. These chords are in total isolation, as all other instruments drop out of the texture. The sudden shift in texture places the focus on the chords and emphasizes their importance:

**Example 11: And we drown, mm. 92-93 (sounding)**

Furthermore, this is the first and only time in the piece that the both tetrachords sound vertically at the same time. It is a terrifying moment, and in the context of Eliot’s poem, it depicts the height of the narrator’s uncertainties and fears. Eliot writes, “I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, / And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and

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4 It is also interesting to note that while this interval class vector contains several IC1s, IC5s, and IC6s, IC3 is still not present.
snicker, / And in short, I was afraid."

Just as the two tetrachords pound and clash against one another in the music, so too does the narrator’s fear of growing old come to a frightening climax.

As we enter into the second large-scale section of the composition at rehearsal H, we return to a music that is more reliant on the (0167) tetrachord. Indeed, the opening notes of the flute melody in m. 103 (see Example 4, above) belong to set class (0167). Moreover, the ending notes of this melody, beginning on the last eighth note of m. 107, also belong to (0167):

**Example 12: And we drown, mm. 108-111**

As the main melody of the second half of the composition, this theme reinforces the (0167) set class in our ears. However, the underlying harp part, which pushes the second half along much like the tritone ostinato pushed along the first half, combines (0167) and (0246) in a new way, resulting in a (0146) tetrachord.

**Example 13: And we drown, m. 101**

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5 Eliot, 6.
6 By coming the subsets (016) and (026), we can create the new tetrachord (0146).
This represents the first time the two tetrachords are deconstructed and reconstructed to create a new tetrachord. Before this point, (0167) and (0268) are often juxtaposed against each, yet they always retain their original prime forms. This time, however, they morph together, symbolizing the narrator’s uncertainty. As listeners, we become uncertain of the music’s harmonies as set classes blur and blend together. Such an effect might also represent the “chambers of the sea” that Eliot discusses in the final portion of his poem.

When the dirge theme returns quietly in the brass in m. 167, we are also uncertain as to whether we will return to the A section, or whether the harps will persist over the brass. The brass still shift between (0167) and (0268) tetrachords, and we are slowly engulfed by the different themes being presented at once. The last note in the brass—which crescendos all the way to forte—is a (0268) tetrachord. The music, however, does not come to rest on the chord. Rather, it cuts off abruptly. The listener might expect to return to a (0167) tetrachord, as the ostinato so often does, or for something else to happen musically. Instead, the listener is left with just one pitch class (G) ringing in the harps—the same pitch class that also began the entire composition. The composition therefore explores the idea of uncertainty and indecision and how a composer might incorporate the idea into a piece of music. By setting expectations early in the work—that (0167) would be the main tetrachord, that the dirge-like ostinato must always return to its (0167) starting notes—I was able to slowly manipulate those expectations until they work against the listener. This is most notable in the last measure. The listener is left hanging, and a sense of uncertainty is achieved.
V. Conclusion

After my graduate composition recital, one of my performers commented that he was starting to understand my musical language, and that I tend to prefer tritones, minor seconds, and major seconds. Although I do not consciously put these intervals into my music, I realize that I am partial to these particular intervals, and my thesis follows these preferences. The fact that almost every measure of my thesis is connected by a (016) trichord—made up of a minor second on the inside and a tritone on the outside—emphasizes such musical inclinations. When I went through my piece to analyze it, I was shocked at how closely related many of my musical ideas were, and at how easily I could analyze my composition using set theory. When composing this piece, I did not think in terms of set classes. Rather, I derived my motives from a limited number of sketches—which, in turn, were inspired by Eliot’s poem—and used them to create two distinctive sections in my composition. Because both sections come from the same source material, however, it is inevitable that they will share similar set classes. There is much that can be analyzed in the composition in terms of set classes, and I invite the listener to do so. However, I also invite the listener to listen to the composition as I originally conceived of it—as a loose representation of T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” I invite you to read his remarkable poetry and to listen to this unique collection of timbres and colors of the wind ensemble that I have come to love.
Bibliography

Cara Haxo

And we drown

for wind ensemble
Like an invitation (\( \dot{q} = c. \ 60 \))

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