

Study Guide for Andrew Staniland's *Four Horsemen*

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Unit 1: Composer

Andrew Staniland is emerging as one of the most important Canadian composers of his generation. He has an extensive catalogue of compositions across a range of genres, including orchestral music, opera, chamber music, and electronic music. Alex Ross of the *New Yorker* magazine has described his music as being “alternatively beautiful and terrifying.”

One of Staniland's major compositions is *Dark Star Requiem*, an eighty-minute work for chamber choir, vocal soloists, piano trio, and percussion. The piece was recently recorded and released on the Centrediscs label. He is also currently working on a ballet for the National Arts Centre's “Encounters” project. A second disc of his music, on the Naxos label, showcases a series of chamber works for percussion, guitar, flute, cello, soprano saxophone, and electronics.

Staniland is an associate professor of composition at Memorial University of Newfoundland. In addition to teaching composition at the university, he is the co-ordinator of the Memorial ElectroAcoustic Research Lab (MEARL). One of his current projects is developing the Mune, a new electronic instrument.

Staniland has been admitted to the Royal Society of Canada, as part of their inaugural cohort of the College of New Scholars, Artists, and Scientists. More information about him can be found on his Web site (www.andrewstaniland.com).

Unit 2: Composition

Four Horseman was co-commissioned by the National Arts Centre Orchestra (Pinchas Zukerman, Music Director) and MusicFest Canada in honour of the NACO's fortieth anniversary. The Canadian Music Centre published the piece in 2012, and a perusal score is available on their Web site. *Four Horsemen* is scored for wind ensemble with electronics and an unusual percussion section, which includes four bass drums, five single crotales, a tam-tam, and two sets of wooden wind chimes.

Staniland gives the following background about this work:

Around the time I was writing this piece in 2012, I had recently completed a series of three chamber works inspired by the passage of the solstices and equinoxes: *Solstice Songs*, for the Gryphon Trio, *The River is Within Us* for Duo Concertante, and *Still Turning* for cellist Frances-Marie Uitti. While composing these works, I came to find inspiration in the idea that phrases such as “the four corners of the earth,” “four horsemen,” and “four angels” can be interpreted beyond their caricature roles, echoing an ancient knowledge about astronomy and celestial movement which sets my creativity alight. I began to interpret the idea of the four horsemen in musical ways: the use of four large concert bass drums, four swinging crotales, and, of course, the actual recorded sounds of horses (and their modern-day equivalents, which I interpreted to be motorcycles) making audible appearances in the electronics. The resulting piece is a fierce yet inquisitive modern work that is more about the joy and inspiration of scientific knowledge than about an apocalyptic vision of the end of the world.

Unit 3: Historical Perspective

Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, western art-music composers turned to electroacoustic instruments to create new sounds. During the 1940s, Pierre Schaeffer pioneered *musique concrète*, which involved manipulating acoustic sounds via electronic processes. While *musique concrète* was popular in France, German composers preferred purer forms of electronic sound generation, turning to solely electronic sound sources instead. Karlheinz Stockhausen was a pioneer in this style, which the Germans named *Elektronische Musik*. While early electronic music was a tool of the avant-garde, it became more mainstream in the latter part of the twentieth century, and is now used by a broad range of Western art-music composers.

A number of current wind-ensemble composers are incorporating electronic sounds into their compositions. Due to technological limitations in the 1980s and '90s, music for wind ensemble and electronics used a single electronic track, creating a fixed-time relationship between the electronic and acoustic sounds. This limitation created pieces that were inflexible and difficult to perform without click tracks. An example of a piece in this style is Jeffrey Haas' *Lost in the Funhouse* (1996), which requires the conductor to keep perfect metronomic alignment with the electronic track throughout the performance. Subsequent advances in electronic-music manipulation and computer software have allowed composers to develop a more flexible approach to the interaction between acoustic and electronic sounds in more recent compositions.

Composers such as Steven Bryant and Mason Bates have availed themselves of these opportunities. Their compositions continue to blend electroacoustic sounds with the traditional wind ensemble. One such composition is *Ecstatic Waters* by Bryant. In this piece, a performer triggers electronic sounds at specific moments via a computer program, allowing for large portions of the work to be free and flexible for the wind ensemble. Bates' *Mothership* uses an approach similar to that of *Ecstatic Waters*. Bates takes electronic sounds from dance music, creating a beat-heavy, quasi-dance track to accompany the wind ensemble.

Unit 4: Technical Considerations

While the Canadian Music Centre does not list grade levels for their music, *Four Horsemen* is approximately a Grade 5 composition (on the six-point scale in widespread use for school-ensemble repertoire). While most individual parts in this work are not extremely difficult, some players have challenging sections: these include the cadenza for the solo flautist, the cadenza for the principal trombone, and the high-register requirements for the principal trumpet. The four percussionists are also extremely independent, generally playing the same rhythms in canonic fashion. There are a number of difficult sixteenth- and thirty-second-note runs throughout the work, which are not always idiomatic. Additionally, several passages in the work feature complex rhythms, including triplets and quintuplets.

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Unit 5: Stylistic Considerations

Four Horsemen requires musicians willing to push their playing to extremes. For example, the trombone solo is marked at *fff*, and includes flutter tonguing, *glissandi*, and numerous *sffzpp* indications with *crescendo*. Staniland marks this solo “like a motorcycle,” an indication that he is keen to explore the harsher timbral capabilities of the trombone. This solo covers a range of C2 to B^b4. The flute cadenza explores the more expressive side of that instrument, marked *a piacere* with a number of colouristic runs into the upper register.

Other extended techniques in *Four Horsemen* include key clicks and key-click trills for all woodwind instruments, flute whistles, and an aleatoric pitch sequence for the entire ensemble. Finally, the electronics performer is required to create live sounds based on the flute cadenza, and follow cues from the conductor. Given the complexity of the role, Staniland recommends a musician/technician for the part.

Unit 6: Musical Elements

MELODY

Staniland does not use traditional melodies in *Four Horsemen*. Instead, he uses a small number of motives as cells for development. The flute solo introduces a number of important motives for the work. In our conversation about the work, Staniland told me he considers this solo as generative, in that much of the melodic and harmonic material for the piece is derived from it. The motives in *Four Horsemen* can be broken into three major groups.

Motif 1: Single Pitch Accelerando

The first example of this motif occurs at measure 9, starting with bass drums and low brass. The low-brass players begin with mostly longer rhythmic values, shifting to progressively shorter rhythms until the release of tension at measure 40.

EXAMPLE 1. (a) EXAMPLE 1. (b)

Example 1. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen*: (a) Tuba, mm. 16–18; and (b) Tuba, mm. 24–26.

Other sections feature similar ideas, albeit with different levels of rhythmic change. Examples include the brass at mm. 99–122 and mm. 137–145.

Motif 2: Metric Ostinati

While the previous motif featured a single pitch, recurring pitch sequences appear throughout *Four Horsemen*. Staniland presents an eight-note pitch *ostinato* at measure 60 during the flute cadenza. This *ostinato* mutates throughout the piece, first reappearing in the Alto Saxophone at measure 74, and then in fragmented versions later in the work.

Example 2. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen*: Flute, m. 60.

Staniland also introduces an aleatoric version of this ostinato at measure 78 in the woodwind parts before expanding the ostinato to the entire ensemble.

Example 3. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen*: Clarinets 1/2/3 and Bass Clarinet, m. 78.

Beginning at measure 101, Staniland splits the eighth-note ostinato into two halves, and creates a dovetailed version between two clarinets. This pattern is accompanied by a new but related idea, a five-note pitch ostinato in the brass parts.

Example 4. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen*: Clarinets 1 and 2, m. 101.

Motif 3: Rising Gesture

Beginning in the 1st Trumpet part at measure 29, a rising scalar/arpeggiated motif occurs thereafter throughout the rest of work. This motif is sometimes rhythmically precise, such as in the woodwinds at measures 88 or 139. At other points, it is played rhythmically *ad libitum*. Staniland uses a free rhythmic presentation of the rising gesture during the flute cadenza at measure 47. Similar gestural rising patterns occur in the flute part at measure 143 and the woodwinds at measure 149.

Example 5. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen*: Trumpets, m. 29.

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Example 6. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen: Trumpets*, m. 110.

HARMONY

Harmonically, *Four Horsemen* contains several examples of extended tonality. Staniland achieves this through employing polychords and non-traditional scale patterns. As a result, sometimes specific pitches in the piece are less important than the effect of the entire pitch cluster.

For example, measure 76 presents an interesting combination of non-traditional scales. The majority of the instruments play an ascending D^b major scale with the added sharpened fifth (A^{\natural}). However, several instruments have different scalar patterns, including an A^b major scale with the added sharpened fifth (E^{\natural}) in the tenor saxophone, and a D Lydian mode in the second half of the measure for 1st flute and 1st clarinet. While it is possible to analyse the harmony in these measures as a full chromatic saturation, Staniland intended for this to be heard as three simultaneous scales.

The trumpets have another non-traditional scale at measure 29, and again in the Coda section. At measure 29, the scale begins on D. Using pitch-class set theory, we can express the scale as [2, 3, 5, 8, 9, E, 1]. Four measures later, the flutes present a scale built on G, expressed as [7, 9, E, 0, 1, 3, 6]. Reducing both scales to prime form reveals that they have the same pattern, expressed as (0135679). Since the scale contains an augmented second, it is not one of the seven diatonic modes. Nor is it a harmonic minor scale. Perhaps the best way to explain it is as a major scale with flatted fifth and sixth degrees.

Example 7. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen: (a) Trumpets*, mm. 29-31, and (b) *Trumpets*, mm. 33-35.

Initially, a harmonic analysis of the passage between measures 146 and 148 appears to be difficult. However, we can use poly-chords and extended chords to demonstrate how Staniland organises this section. The chord in measure 146, (0157) appears to be a set of stacked fourths: D^b (C^{\sharp}), F^{\sharp} and B^{\natural} . Passing through an open-fifth C/G dyad in measure 147, Staniland resolves the tension in measure 148. The chord in bar 148 constitutes a set of stacked fifths in the bass ($D^b/A/E^b$) with an E/B open fifth in the treble.

Example 8. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen: mm. 146-148.*

For an example of a more traditional diatonic polychord, we can turn to the final measure of the piece. Staniland includes the pitches C, E^b , F, G, and A^b in the chord, built upon a C in the bass. Hearing all five pitches as one chord would lead us to one of these three conclusions: a Cmin13, an Fmin9, or an E^b major diatonic cluster. However, Staniland intended for listeners to hear this as a polychord, juxtaposing C minor and F minor simultaneously.

A more complex example occurs at measure 40. Our initial reaction may be to perceive this as full chromatic saturation. Instead, by writing the chord out on piano staves, we can see a series of polychords distributed vertically. As shown in Example 9, Staniland uses an Italian 6th on D^b , A minor, F major, D minor, G major, E^b major, A^b major, and an F^{\sharp} minor chord. When I asked Staniland about this, he confirmed that my analysis was correct.

Example 9. Andrew Staniland, *Four Horsemen: mm. 40.*

Unit 7: Form and Structure

While latter sections recall earlier ideas of the piece, there is no discernable form in *Four Horsemen*. Rather, it is a series of episodes with constantly evolving material derived from the three motives (discussed above). As a result, this analysis groups the piece into seven major sections.

SECTION	MEASURE	EVENT AND SCORING
Introduction	1-8	A sparse rhythmic gesture on five different pitched crotales accompanied by electronic sounds.
Section 1	9-40	Motif 1 beginning with bass drums and low brass before extending to the whole ensemble. The passage begins on a unison D^b before expanding to a 12-tone-saturated pitch set at measure 40.
Section 2	41-59	Flute cadenza with electronic sounds sampled as the flautist plays. The cadenza includes a number of rising gestures (Motif 3) in free time.
Section 3	60-69	Flute solo continues, morphing into a metric ostinato (Motif 2). Solo accompanied by a tone cluster in the woodwinds, beginning with clarinets and oboes before changing to saxophones.

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SECTION	MEASURE	EVENT AND SCORING
Section 4	70–98	A highly developmental section. Begins with key clicks in the woodwinds. All three motives appear simultaneously against a repeated 32 nd -note rhythmic ostinato in the electronics.
Section 5	99–121	Motifs 2 and 3 are presented in a call and response fashion against a 16 th -note rhythmic ostinato in the electronics.
Transition	122–125	Return to the introduction material, sparse bell tones presented in the electronics and winds against eighth-notes in the bass drums.
Section 6	126–136	Trombone cadenza, reminiscent of a motorcycle, is presented against an increasingly dense background tone-cluster in the woodwinds. The electronics include a metronomic clicking.
Section 7	137–145	Motif 3 scales appear throughout the ensemble against a rhythmic ostinato reminiscent of Motif 1 in the low brass and bass drums.
Coda	146–157	The rhythmic tension gives way to long chords in the brass, with Motif 3 scalar gestures interjected in the woodwinds.



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Carolina. He has conducted a range of wind ensembles, brass bands, and orchestras throughout Australia and North America.

Unit 8: Suggested Listening

Mason Bates, *Mothership*

Steven Bryant, *Ecstatic Waters*

Steven Bryant, *The Machine Awakes*

Jeffrey Haas, *Lost in the Funhouse*

Alex Shapiro, *Moment*

Andrew Staniland, *Flute vs. Flute*

Andrew Staniland, *Four Angels*

Christopher Stark, *Augenblick*

Edgard Varese, *Deserts*

Unit 9: Additional References and Resources

Ableton. "Mason Bates on composing for electronics and orchestra." Web resource. Accessed October 28, 2016. <https://www.ableton.com/en/blog/mason-bates-alternative-energy/>

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