

Flood Tide: sonification as musical performance—an audience perspective

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Abstract The number of events and artifacts described as sonification has increased considerably in recent years with some works making a bridge between the representation of data and artistic expression. *Flood Tide* which sonifies the flow of tidal water is such a work and has achieved a relatively high profile attracting good audiences for its 10 performances to date. It is not entirely obvious however what it is that attracts audiences and whether it is effective at representing the data being sonified. This paper aims to address these issues and is based on a discussion group in which these and other questions are considered.

Keywords Sonification · Algorithmic composition · Live notation · Tide

1 Introduction

Flood Tide is a musical performance generated in real time from live tidal stream data translated into musical notation and read from computer screens by an ensemble of orchestral instruments. As the work is described more fully elsewhere in this journal, I shall limit its description here. The work has been performed 10 times to date. It began in 2008 performed by a quartet of 2 celli, marimba and vibraphone at Trinity Buoy Wharf in Docklands, London, with a duration of 90 min. In 2009, it was performed as a sextet with the addition of alto flute and bass clarinet at Royal Greenwich Observatory, London and Stratford Upon Avon River Festival each

performance lasting 2 h. It was then increased in scale to an orchestra of 31 at the 2009 Thames Festival. In 2010, it was performed at the Southbank Centre in London as part of the See Further Festival of Science¹ with an ensemble of 40 and spanning an entire incoming tide lasting 6 h.



Photography by John Richardson

From these events, the work has been well received by a wide and diverse audience and it has received some interest

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¹ Flood Tide—See Further Festival, Southbank Centre, 4th July 2010. <http://www.seefurtherfestival.org/events/view/flood-tide>.