

RHIAN SAMUEL BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

- Rhian Samuel was born in Aberdare, South Wales, in 1944 and now lives and works in Oxford, London and Wales. As a child she learnt the oboe and began to compose around the age of nine.
- After school, Rhian continued her studies at Reading University and then went abroad to St Louis University in the United States to take an MA and later a PhD. During this time composing music became the main focus of her activities: “Once I’d discovered writing music, and getting performed, I got hooked on it and just wanted to continue to do that”.
- Rhian has spent a lot of her life teaching at conservatoires and universities, initially in the United States and then later at her old university in Reading (where she was head of department) and then at City University, London, where she became Professor of Music in 1999. Since 2009, she has also taught composition at Magdalen College, Oxford.
- She has composed and published nearly 120 pieces ranging from chamber and choral music through to orchestral pieces which have been performed the world over.

ARIEL BACKGROUND NOTES

Ariel was commissioned for and premiered by Nicola Ellis and Sadie Harrison at King's College, London, on 27 June 1988. It is published by Stainer & Bell.

The work is in one movement lasting around 6-7 minutes. This is what the composer has written about it:

“The piece begins tentatively: the flute is ambivalent about playing a duo. Just as the two instruments begin to coordinate, the flute makes off with the shared material, weaving for itself an arching reverie. The piano, daunted, lapses into silence. Later it attempts to coax the flute back into the ensemble with insistent, rhythmic chords. Its persistence is rewarded: an energetic dance ensues as the piano beats out a 5/8 rhythmic pattern and the flute trills shrilly. But the flute veers off yet again, uttering wild arpeggios until it is almost spent. As it attempts to return to its earlier lyricism, the piano, ever patient, gently joins in, supporting the dying melody. The flute is too exhausted to protest”.

CONCEPT

Rhian Samuel's *Ariel* can be interpreted in different ways. Musically it is a tightly argued structure, falling into five clearly defined linked sections, containing motifs that are continually developed and transformed as well as ideas that return (for instance, the fragmented melody that opens and closes the piece). However, the composer's programme note also proposes a narrative in which the piano and flute take on the identity of two different characters: the flute is spontaneous and demonstrative but not good at taking the feelings of others (such as the piano) into account and often rushes headlong into situations without thinking of the consequences. The piano, ever patient, tries all sorts of ways to partner the flute, but is sometimes daunted by the situation.

If you are aware of this scenario, then you can hear the work in a different, more dramatic way. This use of what might be called "narrative form" can bring alive a piece of music and can be a useful way of composing, but, as the composer John Casken points out, "it [also] has to work for someone who knows nothing of your programme" (Paul Griffiths: *New Sounds, New Personalities*, Faber 1985, p.91). *Ariel* does this and is a piece of lively abstract music in its own right, but one whose programme also stimulates the imagination.

The work's title refers to Ariel of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a flying, magical, invisible spirit.

ANALYSIS

The different sections of *Ariel* are as follows:

1-42	SECTION 1 (CAPRICCIOSO)
43-60	SECTION 2 (ANDANTINO) FLUTE ALONE
61-89	SECTION 3 (TEMPO 1)
90-119	SECTION 4 (ALLEGRO)
120-132	SECTION 5 (LENTO)

DETAILED RÉSUMÉ OF STRUCTURE

Section 1 (Bars 1-42). Capriccioso, crochet = c.92

Section 1a (Bars 1-23)

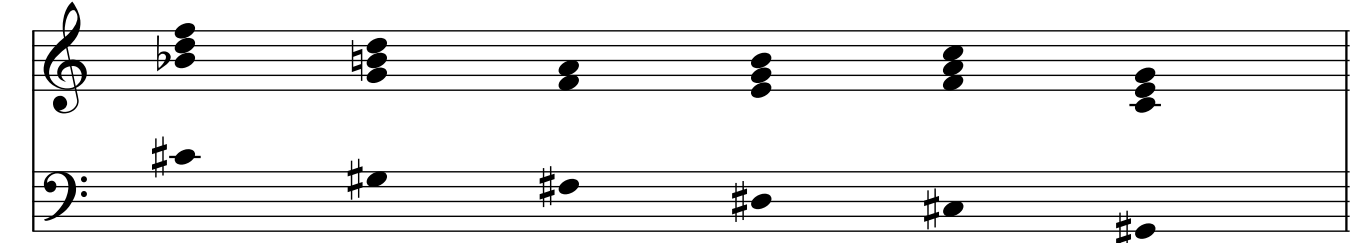
1 – 23

The first section, like the second, shows a gradual build-up of a motif whose grace notes offer articulation: from one to two notes, etc. All these are drawn from the semitone (heard as major 7ths and minor 9ths). At the opening, the notes move through 11 out of the 12 notes of the chromatic scale reaching the E flat at bar 9 (the missing note is D: see Example 1). There is a thickening of texture through the harmonisation of motifs in the piano, starting at bar 9, this characterised by major and minor triads with an added semitone (See Example 2). The flute's phrases get longer and more complicated, now using a wide variety of different intervals as almost the whole range of the instrument is explored. The build-up culminates at bar 18, where the flute line rises to a climactic high A. This falls to a high F; the pattern is then echoed by the D – B flat fall (bars 22-23) at the end of the section.

Ex. 1 (Flute / Piano. Bars 1 - 9)



Ex. 2 (Piano. Bars 10 - 12)



Section 1a (Bars 24-42)**24-42**

This section shows another build-up of the two-note motif, reaching at bar 35 a clear homophonic declaration of a 9-note phrase by the two instruments, which ‘stamps on’ continued development. The rest of the section, to bar 42, shows a winding down of the material: a calmer, 3-note figure (bar 37) is extended into a 4-note figure (bars 39-40, piano RH). The section ends decisively; the flute’s very high B helps define the total range of the piece. It drops a 4th to F# giving its version of the 4-note figure, while the final long D in the piano completes the initial series of 12 notes missing from fig.1 at the outset.

- What main interval dominates both the flute and piano during the first nine bars of *Ariel*?
- What characteristics can be found in the block chords introduced in the piano between the end of bar 10 and the beginning of bar 12?
- What part do the 12 notes of the chromatic scale play in the opening nine bars and then, subsequently, in the flute part from bars 13-17?
- What is the relationship between the block chords between the end of bar 10 and the beginning of bar 12 and the figure heard in the piano between bars 30 and 32?
- What is the significance of the low held D in the piano at bars 41-42?

Section 2 (Bars 43-60). Andantino, crochet = c.72

This is a *cadenza* for flute alone, beginning slowly and gaining in rapidity. The low C# provides an anchor, moving to D# and back to C# at bar 57. Towards the end of the section, the phrases end with dropping 4ths, (B-F#; F-C; G-D), ending the *cadenza* as it was introduced (with the dropping 4th B – F# at bar 42).

- Explain how the low C# operates as an anchor pitch throughout the *cadenza*?
- In what way do the series of falling 4ths at the close of the *cadenza* relate to close of Section 1?

Section 3 (Bars 61-89). Tempo 1, crochet = c.92

This is a scherzo-like passage, developing and expanding material from Section 1 and introducing the material of the following section.

61 - 89

This offers a gradual increase in activity and dynamics, reaching the highest point (a high A) at bars 68-69 against the triplet figure heard at bars 30-32 (fig.2). At bar 62 the piano briefly introduces staccato repeated chords; they disappear but return at bar 72, gradually becoming more regular while the flute continues with its two-note figures, revealing the previously-heard 3-note figure at bars 83-84 and becoming obsessively repeated at bars 88-89. The build-up continues across the opening of the 'new section' at bar 90.

- What figure originally heard in Section 1 makes an appearance once again in Section 3?
- How are the chords in the piano between bars 72-82 made-up?

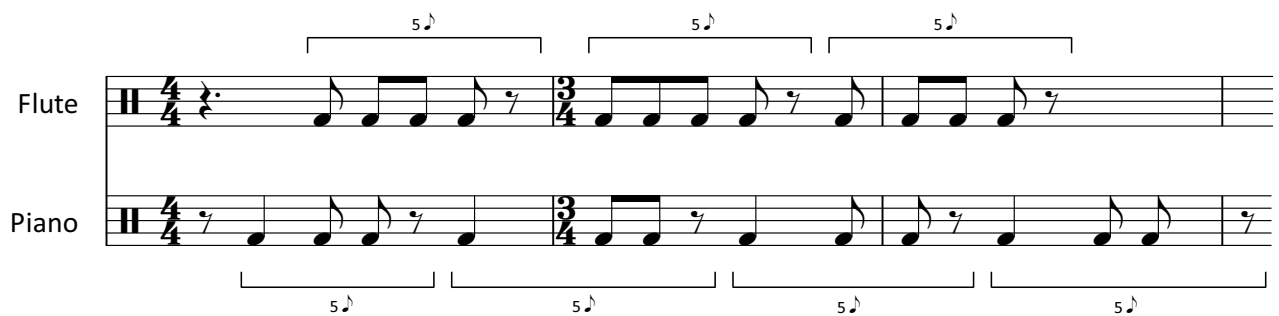
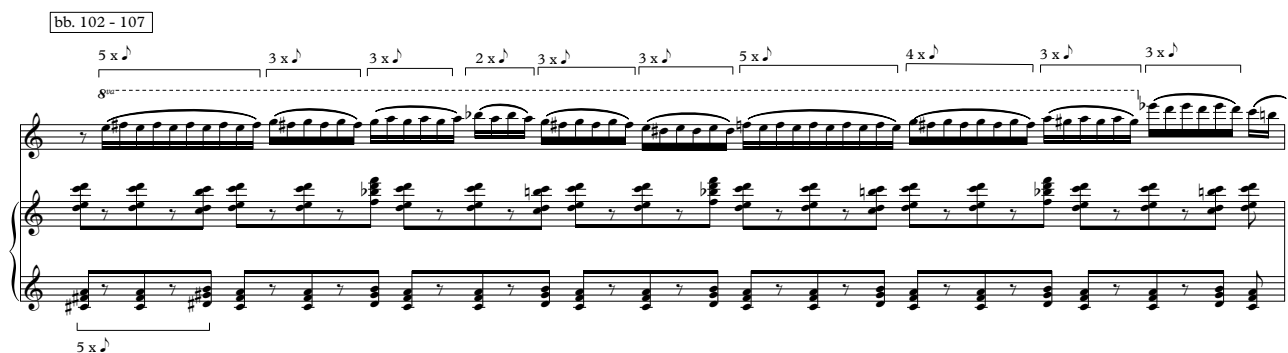
Section 4 (Bars 90-120). Allegro, crochet = c.120

The penultimate section: the flute and piano play in polyrhythm, reaching the work's climax.

90-112

Here, the flute's 4-note pattern 'fights against' the piano; the piano's series of 3-note (harmonised) motifs refer back to bars 37-42. Both instruments define a 5/8 rhythm, though oppositionally (bars 90-92); then the piano introduces the reappearance of the staccato chords. By bar 102 these chords have turned into another 5/8 figure. Eventually, at bar 100, the flute drops into a shrill set of written out trills of varying lengths, almost never coinciding with the 5/8 metre of the piano (See Example 3). This comes to a close with an upward flute flourish (bar 113).

Ex. 3 (Bars 90 - 92. Rhythm only)

113-120

This is the virtuosic climax: a more flamboyant flute cadenza than before, accompanied at first by a long (equally flamboyant) upward arpeggio on the piano, culminates in five downward arpeggios in flute alone (bars 117-20). The final upward diminished octave (major 7th) in bar 121 invites a 'gingerly' return of the original two-note motif.

- What rhythmic device is particularly used in Section 4?
- What metrical rhythm can be found in the piano part between bars 102-110 and how does the composer make us hear it?
- Does the flute share the piano's rhythm between bars 102-108 and, if not, what does it have?

Section 5 (Bars 121-132). Lento, crochet = c.56

A return to the pitch material of the opening section

121 - 124

The two-note motif appears at first in flute alone, then the piano is added. There is a brief return to the music of bars 45-47, now a semitone higher.

124 - 132

The flute plays a variant of fig.2 (124-128) passing through all 12 notes of the chromatic scale followed by a return to fig.1 (129-132). The piano, from bar 125, is entirely made up of fig.1. The flute gradually returns to the middle C with which the work opens.

TONALITY

Ariel does not use major / minor keys or functional tonality, but neither is it atonal. The music is fluid and chromatic, not settling into tonal centres in the usual way. However, certain sections open out from and return to notes that become what might be called “anchor points”. Here are some examples:

- The first note heard is a middle C from which notes “fan out” on either side (B – C# etc). However, it continues to play an important part, is often repeated and returned to for the first few bars and the music returns to the same note in the final bar.
- At the beginning of Section 2 (bar 43), the flute outlines a G major triad and the note G (as well as D) also remains an important reference point for the first 4 or 5 bars. At the end of the section it is returned to again (see bar 61 where a high G drops to D).
- Also in Section 2, the low C# to which the flute returns at the end of every phrase becomes an anchor.
- In the 5/8 section (bars 102-111) the principal repeated chord has a bass note of C#, while the uppermost voice has a repeated note of D.

- Give two examples of how certain notes take on a particular importance in *Ariel*.

TEXTURE AND SONORITY

In *Ariel* both the flute and piano parts are of equal importance: the way in which the two instruments react to one another lies at the heart of this piece.

- In bars 1-10, the texture is fragmented and the two instruments pass the tiny 2 and 3-note figures back and forth, constantly adding new pitches to them. It's almost like a conversation. The introduction of harmony in the piano at bars 10-11 is similar to introducing a new idea into the conversation and the long piano chord at bars 15-17 continues this; the composer writes of it, "The piano, daunted, lapses into silence"
- The tessitura of the flute gradually rises in bars 1-18 from its lowest notes to its highest at the end of the section. This use of tessitura is important in helping to shape sections throughout the work and define their climactic points. See also similar focal points such as bars 35 or 68.
- In the section starting at bar 24 the flute and piano seem to restart their conversation, but the flute's part becomes increasingly independent, the two only coming back together in unison at bars 35-36.
- The whole section for flute alone between bars 43-61 not only develops the idea of the instrument as an independent character, but helps to create variety of texture and add dramatic weight to the re-entry of the piano at bar 62.
- The texture between the two instruments in the whole of Section 3 emphasises the emotional distance between the two. Both seem to have entirely different material, the flute free and extravagant and the piano, in the composer's words, "attempts to coax the flute back into the ensemble with insistent, rhythmic chords".

- The interaction between the two instruments reaches its climax in Section 4 (bars 90-120) where an “energetic dance” is introduced. However, the difference between the two instruments is emphasised by the polyrhythmic relationship of this passage (see “Rhythm” for more detail).
- The final section attempts to bring the two disparate parts back together. The flute attempts “to return to its earlier lyricism, the piano, ever patient, gently joins in, supporting the dying melody. The flute is too exhausted to protest”.
- Much of the writing for the two instruments is not unusual in its general figuration, but the opening section in particular and its later return (for instance at bars 18-26, 62 67 and in the final section from bar 125 to the end), picks up on and transforms a particular fragmented style of texture that was common in much avant-garde music of the 1950s and early 60s. In works like Boulez’s *Le marteau sans maître* (1954) or Stockhausen’s *Kontrapunkte* (1953), the texture is often similarly fragmented in this pontillistic manner.

- What other composers have used the fragmented rhythmic style of the opening of *Ariel*?
- Give two examples of the way in which the difference between the two instruments is projected in *Ariel*.

HARMONIC LANGUAGE

This section describes the use of harmony in *Ariel*.

- Much of the texture in *Ariel* moves in two or three-part counterpoint, with the piano often moving in independent lines in response to the flute part. This underlines the importance of the harmonic passages when they do occur.
- The first such passage is at bars 10-12 and these define clearly one of the harmonic styles of the piece. All the chords here are based around major and minor triads (B flat major, G major, F major (no 5th), E minor, A minor and E minor). To these there is an added one extra note, a semitone apart from one of the other notes in the chord (see example). Most other chords in the same passage are variations of this (sometimes the 5th might be missing from the triad).
- In the next section there is an emphasis on harmony is between bars 72-87. Here the chords are mainly (but not exclusively) bi-tonal in their make-up. For instance at bars 75-77 F / E major, bar 77 C minor / D minor or at bar 80 A / D major, D minor / C major and so forth. The chord's "lean" sound is achieved by not sounding one full (ie. 3-note chord) against another; instead the chord is reduced to 2 notes – a 5th or a 3rd.
- Much of the harmony in the penultimate section (bars 91-120) is similar in construction. For instance, the chords in bars 102-110 consist of common chords in the left hand against occasional common chords in the right hand (for instance, G# minor against B flat major) or clusters of notes in bitonal combinations (for instance B-C-D in the right hand against E flat major in the left hand).

TEMPO, METRE & RHYTHM

TEMPO

The five sections of *Ariel* fluctuate between four different tempi reaching the fastest tempo for the climactic dance in bars 90-120: *crescendo* = 92 (Section 1), *crescendo* = 72 with an *accelerando* and *rallentando* (Section 2), *crescendo* = 92 (Section 3), *crescendo* = 120 (Section 4) and finally *crescendo* = 56 (Section 5).

METRE

The use of time-signatures is generally restricted to simple metres such as 3/4 and 4/4 (with one 7/8 bar in Section 4). However, within these there is much use of either polyrhythm or other devices for disguising where the actual bar line falls.

- An example for disguising the barline can be found in the opening bars: here the space between the beginning of each group of notes between both instruments gradually opens out by a quaver and then closes back in again: 2:3:4:5:5:3:3 etc.
- A similar device can be seen in the quaver rests between the reiterated piano chords from bar 72 onwards: 3:4:2:3:3:3:2:2:3:4:3:5 etc

POLYRHYTHM

Polyrhythm is particularly featured in Section 4. Here are two examples:

- Between bars 90-93, the flute and piano open in overlapping polyrhythms of 5/8 (although the passage is notated in 4/4 and 3/4 - see Example 3).
- From bar 102-08, the piano reiterates a 5/8 rhythm (though notated in 3/4) against a constantly fluctuating rhythmic passage in the flute (from 102 in quavers: 5+3+3+2+3+3+5+4+3+3+3+3+2 etc – see Example 4).

SERIALISM

Some of the melodic lines in *Ariel* outline the 12 notes of the chromatic scale as used in serial technique. For instance, at the outset of the work, the flute and piano gradually introduce 11 of the notes of the 12. This differs from classical serial technique insofar as notes are repeated as others are gradually introduced (normally notes would not be repeated until all 12 are introduced). The composer writes: “The piece is basically highly chromatic, not 12-note (though of course I studied serial pieces intently as a student and this undoubtedly comes through); it avoids the obvious repetition of pitches in some areas and the cultivation of it in others!”

DYNAMICS

Dynamics in *Ariel* are largely used in different ways. Some examples are:

- to create the overall shape of sections and establish moments of climax (see bars 1-17 moving from *pp* to *ff*);
- to create a sense of dialogue between the flute and piano (see bars 1-10, 61-71 or 125-132);
- to create an insistent call and response between the two instruments using just one *f* dynamic marking (see bars 74-82).

RESOURCES

CD: Catherine Handley / Andrew Wilson-Dickson. HAL 004

Website: www.rhiansamuel.com

The author would like to thank Rhian Samuel for reading through this analysis and providing many suggestions and amendments to the original script.