

## ***Aue!* by Christopher Marshall**

### **A guide to rehearsal and performance by Mark Heron**

#### **Introduction**

Instigated by Tim Reynish and commissioned under the auspices of the WASBE School Band Network (chair - Richard Jones) *Aue!* was premiered at the 2001 BABSWE Conference by Chetham's Wind Orchestra and John Dickinson. Arguably the first 'cyber-wind-commission', the consortium included over 60 individuals, school, university and community bands from 12 countries (if you count Scotland, England & Wales as separate countries which, being from the first of those I of course must!).

As I noted in my conference review for Winds (Summer 2001 issue), first reaction was a little mixed. But my own personal view was sufficiently positive after hearing the second performance in the National Concert Band Festival the following day to programme the work for autumn 2001 with the North Cheshire Concert Band.

By the time this article goes to print we will have given four performances of *Aue!*, the first of which the composer announced as the premiere of the 'revised version'. This is Chris's first attempt at writing for winds and I do not regard it as unfair to comment that he did fall for a number of the usual pitfalls – having done so he is in the very best of company.

Having heard recordings of the first performance he immediately came up with, in particular, some revised dynamics, and following a flurry of emails between us over the summer a number of errata and revisions have resulted. I found Chris to be extremely co-operative, and the willingness with which he took on board suggestions and produced revised parts in .pdf form was greatly appreciated. Should you purchase a set of parts from Maecenas, I would urge you to contact Chris in order to obtain the list of corrections which is available. In fact I have just heard from Chris that Maecenas are shortly to publish a second edition incorporating the revisions.

In terms of difficulty, the work is certainly a little more tricky than was initially intended. However, I draw a distinction here between individual technical difficulty and global ensemble skills. The individual parts are to my mind within the grasp of grade 3.5 players. The challenge lies in corporate ensemble skills, and a band which is familiar only with more 'obvious' tonalities and structures will be stretched by this work. On the other hand, players who are used to counting, confident enough to make entries alone or in small groupings, and open-minded enough not to immediately dismiss something which on the first reading may well not make a lot of sense, could have a lot of fun with *Aue!*. This is also a difficult piece to rehearse and an unprepared conductor could well come to grief in fairly spectacular fashion in the early rehearsals.

#### **The Work**

In his programme note, Chris writes that for '*three years he lived inland at Vaia'ata in Savai'i, Samoa. In the evenings you could hear sounds from the villages carried on the sea breeze – songs, dances, bells, drums – all filtered and transformed by the mists of the rain forest.*'

Essentially, the main body of the piece is a collage of traditional song, dance, hymns, the sound of conch shells being blown, all underpinned by four chords;

1. E<sup>7</sup>                    E, G#, B, D
2. F#m<sup>7</sup>                F#, A, C#, E
3. Dmaj<sup>7</sup>              D, F#, A, C#
4. Amaj<sup>7</sup>                A, C#, E, G#

These are related by having at least one common note with the other three. Save for one or two points, there are only one or two chords sounding at any one time. It is also possible to think of the music as being built on one 'superchord' of ascending thirds starting on D below the bass clef: D F# A C# / E G# B D / F# A C# E / G# B D F# – the two 7th chords in the middle of the spectrum getting the most airing. Whichever way you analyse them, these chords, almost without exception, should be very much in the background. Play them pianissimo with very gentle hairpins.



Fig. 6 A chorale figure in the low brass which gradually attains a more sedate feel in each subsequent statement.



On closer inspection it can be seen that figures 1 and 5 are exactly the same material. The very different speeds, registers and instrumentation lead to a complete transformation of character. The same for figures 2 and 6.

The final section from measure 282 dispenses with the chords, pulling the various fragments (or at least elements of them) together in what I think is a very exciting and indeed fairly riotous conclusion.

There are prominent percussion parts; vibraphone, log drums (which the composer states can be substituted for wood-blocks although my preference is for temple-blocks), bells, whistles, tam-tam etc.

Oboe, E $\flat$  clarinet, horn and bassoon parts are extensively cued although one oboe and at least 2 horns are required.

### **Rehearsal Suggestions**

#### **Tempo**

Apart from the final 11 measures, there are essentially two alternating tempi. Tempo 1 is crotchet/ quarter note = 96 in 2/4, Tempo 2 is crotchet/ quarter note = 144, mostly in 3/4. Therefore the pulse of the measure remains constant at 48. This relationship is vital to a successful performance. In particular, the vibraphone part often straddles the tempo changes, playing triplet quavers/ eighth notes in Tempo 1 and straight quavers/ eighths in Tempo 2 – i.e. the actual note values remain constant.

With top level players and ample rehearsal time I would advocate conducting the majority of the piece in one, but this may not be practicable for many groups.

#### **Chords**

The difficulty for all but the very best players will be achieving a consistent, good quality pianissimo in the long chords – especially in the brass. At Chris's suggestion we experimented with mutes and I think this works for the horns. For the rest of the brass I felt this resulted in a slightly nasal sound – something the composer specifically said he did not want. Apart from anything else, many of the bands that will play this piece may not have ready access to tuba and euphonium mutes.

The solution we came up with was to hang cloths/ dusters/ towels loosely over the bells. This has the effect of softening the sound without altering its character too much and allows the players to produce the notes with a little more confidence.

The conductor must constantly remind the players that the chords should remain in the background, and that they must not balance up to the fragments, which are often very strident.

#### **Rehearsal Technique**

This is a major issue, and one which requires careful advance planning. The nature of the problem is that for the first two thirds or more of the piece the majority of the players play nothing more than long notes – and unless they are playing cues, the same long note at that! Whilst this is excellent practice for tone production and breath control, it is potentially excruciatingly boring – particularly as the conductor will want to rehearse the fragments not the long notes.

However, against this, the constantly alternating tempi and the less than obvious nature of many of the entries mean that even for the 'long note brigade' plenty of rehearsal is needed in order to become familiar with the piece.

My solution is threefold:

1. Start by rehearsing the final section, probably from measure 239. This is where the themes come together, the fast tempo is maintained to the end, and everybody gets something interesting to play. By isolating the various groupings and spending time getting this section correct, the conductor can get the players on his or her side. For all but the best players there is ample material in these final 90 measures or so to fill 45 minutes of 'first rehearsal' time.
2. Next, have some sectional rehearsals. I would suggest 30-40 minutes with saxophones, the same for percussion, and maybe 30 minutes for the clarinets. Perhaps flutes and double reeds together, and split the high brass and low brass for 20 minutes each.
3. Then and only then, start to rehearse from the beginning with the whole group. Hopefully, the players will be reasonably confident with their own parts and your task is to draw them together and not to rehearse the individual sections whilst the aforementioned long note brigade lose concentration and interest.

I realise the above could be an ideal rehearsal schedule for many pieces, but I do feel there is particular benefit in approaching *Aue!* in this way.

**Specific Suggestions** (references are to measure numbers):

- 5 Unless your group is one to a part, there will be balance problems. With the clarinet chord, the bass clarinet note should be doubled by another player. If all of your strongest players are on 1<sup>st</sup>, I suggest you redistribute them equally. Less capable 3<sup>rd</sup> players, for example, will find it difficult to tune the third of the chord if the strong players are all playing the 7<sup>th</sup>.
- 12 Make friends with your vibraphone player! He or she will be able to tell you whether the tempo changes are working.
- 27 Ask the timpanist to crescendo through the glissandi.
- 28 This chord grouping is tricky both for ensemble and intonation. Most of the chords are within sections but here it is trumpets and oboe 1.
- 34 Flutes and E♭ Clarinet need to play strongly.
- 43 The first statement of the 'conch' theme. This should be loud, coarse and not particularly pleasing to the ear – a saxophone player's dream, then! Rehearse the two alto parts together and then in canon, and ask the players not to worry too much about the grace note – it needn't be a specific pitch.
- 58 The first tempo change. My inclination is for a slightly lower tempo than marked but whatever numbers you choose, make sure the relationship is correct at least over the changes.
- 65 There are too many entries in this piece for the conductor to cue each one so it is important to prioritise. This is the first appearance of 'chord 3' and the first entry by the tubas and bassoons and I think they would welcome your assistance here.
- 73 Back to Tempo 1, but point out to the piccolo that the rhythm in this measure is identical to that they have played in the fast section. They may therefore find it easier to think of measure 73 as a 3/4 measure in Tempo 2.
- 74 Make sure the oboe differentiates between the triplet anacrusis and the quaver/ eighth note at the end of this measure.

- 85 Tempo 2 again, but this time there should be a real one in the bar feel. Trumpets at 87 are a variant of the flutes/ Eb clarinet at 34. This, and other fragments played by the brass, should be played open with the cloths/ towels being replaced before the next chord.
- 96 Be sure to rehearse the trumpets, double reeds and flutes in the last 3 measures of this section. The crotchets/ quarter notes should be quite prominent.
- 117 This is an important section. For the first time all four chords overlap and in the following measure the clarinets announce what I regard as the main theme. There should be a sense of arrival at this point, although try not to allow the dynamic of the chords to increase by virtue of the fact that there are more people playing.
- 118 Be sure of your tempo here. In comparison to all of its other appearances, the clarinet theme may feel very slow.
- 121 Tenor saxophone should have an A# not a C# through to measure 139 (this error has apparently been corrected in the second edition).
- 130 Bass clarinet, bassoons, bass trombone and tuba should be quite strong. You might want the euphonium to play this figure as well.
- 138 Keep the oboe, Eb clarinet, and later, the flutes and bassoons quite crisp, taking care not to drag.
- 153 I suggest postponing the diminuendo in piccolo, flutes, oboes, Eb clarinet and bassoons until 156.
- 154 Here, and on a couple of other occasions the clarinet chord entry is on the half bar. In the interests of precise ensemble you might ask them to articulate these just a little more, followed by a decay.
- 157 As there are no fragments until 168, ask the percussion to play a little more prominently here.
- 168 The low brass and bassoons enter with the chorale fragment. They should be open and quite sonorous although keeping a steady pulse. Replace the cloths before 191.
- 187 An important section for the saxophones, and the first time the tenor and baritone join the altos on the 'conch' theme, this is well worth spending time on in a sectional. Focus the players' minds on the triplets and semiquavers/ sixteenth notes, perhaps by rehearsing the section with them playing only the first note of the quintuplets. This should hopefully secure the rhythm more easily. Point out to the tenor and baritone that they should not diminuendo as the altos drop out. If you do not have a baritone you will need to cue this section elsewhere. Make sure that 204 is together.
- 197 Cue the bells, which should be quite prominent.
- 211 This is a good 'coming together point' if things have gone a little astray. Tell your players that you will give a clear (but subtle) signal on letter Y and that the clarinets enter 3 measures later.
- 216 Low brass remove cloths.
- 225 The rhythm in Eb and 1<sup>st</sup> clarinet is tricky. Make sure they place the triplet quaver/ eighth note in 226 right on the second beat, not before it.
- 231 The clarinets have the same figure as the saxophones at 187 and the same concerns apply.
- 238 If you get to here without too many problems you should be home and dry! I suggest dispensing with good conducting technique here and giving three very precise (but small) active beats in this measure even though it is essentially just a long note. This will help the saxophones to make a confident entry in 239. Rehearse the saxophones and low brass who must bounce off the quaver/ eighth note at the start of 241. Keep the brass rhythmic and I suggest they adopt Jim Croft's maxim of the notes 'not quite touching' for the syncopations.

- 252 Ask the oboes to play *tutta forza* and with an accent followed by a diminuendo to the bar line.
- 253 Bassoon and baritone sax must be strong. In the new edition the euphonium plays here as well. If you are using the old edition, cue in the euphonium or even the bass trombone. Make sure the chords stay light and in the background at this point.
- 262 The horns will need to take mutes out here. Similarly, trumpets remove cloths.
- 272 1<sup>st</sup> trombone very prominent.
- 273 At last, the horns get to do something other than play their solitary long note. If rigor mortis has not set in, they should be prominent, crisp, and well articulated. I suggest you smile at them somewhere around 269 to check for signs of life, and ask them to shorten their long note in 272 maybe even by the whole measure. No matter how much you warn them, the articulation and speed of air-stream required will come as a shock after the previous 272 measures.
- 274 Make sure the bass trombone, euphonium, bassoons and tubas are crisp on their repeated note bass line.
- 282 The crescendo into 282 should be significant and this is an exciting moment, however there is still a long way to go. In the interests of a well-paced climax and clarity of texture, ask (or if you need to, beg) the players to release the dynamic once they arrive here. Particularly in the long notes, which whilst no longer the background pianissimo of before should not cloud the themes.
- 286 This point is of general application but particularly important here: Make sure the clarinets and high saxophones are not sluggish coming off the long note in 286, 290, 294 etc. Asking them to shorten the note and leave a bigger rest is probably worthwhile, save for the very best groups who should do this automatically.
- 291 Reference to whip in first edition of the score is incorrect. It should be whistle.
- 299 This is a great moment in the horns and you might ask them to give a little more here.
- 306 I like to make a real feature of the rhythmic figure. Ask the tubas, euphonium & bass trombone to put bells up for 306 only, tenor trombones for 307 only and trumpets for 308 only.
- 309 The triplet figure is difficult although not as bad as it looks. I pointed out that it might have been easier to read as triplet crotchets/ quarter notes rather than tied quavers/ eighths. The new edition adopts this notation. In any event, with so many repeated notes and so much else happening, not to mention the grace notes, clarity of articulation is the difficulty once the rhythm is secure. Again, putting some daylight between the notes is helpful and will aid rhythm as well as clarity. As the other parts are essentially repeating the previous material I think the triplet theme should be dominant here.
- 322 Again, asking the players who have a long note tied over the bar line to shorten it will assist with a clean *piu mosso*. If the High Log Drum can be secure and prominent at the beginning of the measure that will help. I have found the difficulty here not so much to be the theme but the bass line. Think of the 5/4 as 2 + 3 and make sure the bass line players aim for the third beat of the measure.
- 326 Again, the bass line must be strong. If you have strong horn players you could double the bass trombone part in the second half of the measure in the 4<sup>th</sup> horn, and perhaps also 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- 327 The triplet figure in the high wind is very fast if you are at crotchet = 168. If some of the players are struggling they might just play the first note of each group.
- 329 Make sure the diminuendo is sufficient to allow the tin drum to come through.

332 The tam-tam should be all but knocked off its stand, and as the composer says in the score everyone should freeze until the very last sound has died away. This could possibly be quite a long time, and it is worth rehearsing it rather than trusting it go all right on the night

In the comment on measure 253 I have suggested making sure the chords stay light and in the background. I could in fact have added those words to each and every one of the above paragraphs, as this is vital to make the piece work. I hear too many performances by bands where the long notes and accompaniment figures are too loud and obscure the interesting material. This leads the solo players to play louder and we have the inevitable vicious circle leading to an entire performance at loud dynamics.

It is simply not possible to achieve a good performance of *Aue!* unless the players are sensitive to the relative dynamic levels. For this reason alone I recommend it as useful repertoire for any band of any level.

### **Performance Suggestions**

There is no doubt that for the non-specialist audience this work presents an unfamiliar sound world. In my performances so far, I have set aside 15 minutes of time within the programme – 7 minutes for the performance prefaced by at least the same amount of time introducing the piece. Tell the audience the background and then demonstrate some of the material.

Play each of the chords in turn, perhaps asking the player who has the common note to hold through at the end of chord 1, be joined by the player who plays that note in chord 2, and then bring in the rest of chord 2. This helps to explain the sound world and provide some logic which will not immediately be apparent to the untrained ear.

Then present each of the themes in turn, and perhaps demonstrate the effect of the cloths in the brass. Most audiences do not need this kind of assistance with Mozart or Gershwin, but a little time spent laying out a few aural signposts is worthwhile with pieces such as this.

### **Conclusion**

In my opinion *Aue!* is a significant addition to the repertoire and I hope it is taken up by bands at all levels. It is certainly more than a 'school band piece', although it will be technically achievable by reasonably experienced young players. By avoiding the cliché of so much of our repertoire it is sufficiently original to provide contrast in most programmes, and the theatrical aspects are an added bonus to what I think is musically a very satisfying work.