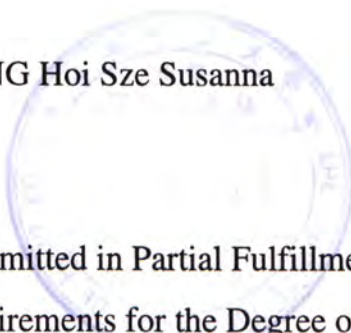


Timbre and Tintinnabulation in the Music of Arvo Pärt

WONG Hoi Sze Susanna



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy
in
Music

©The Chinese University of Hong Kong
September 2001

The Chinese University of Hong Kong holds the copyright of this thesis. Any person(s) intending to use a part or whole of the materials in the thesis in a proposed publication must seek copyright release from the Dean of the Graduate School.



Abstract of thesis entitled:

Timbre and Tintinnabulation in the Music of Arvo Pärt

Submitted by Wong Hoi Sze Susanna

for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Music

at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in June 2001

Arvo Pärt (born 1935), one of the most outstanding Estonian composers, studied composition at the Tallinn Conservatory, graduating in 1963. He first gained recognition in Soviet Russia in 1959 with his prize-winning tonal cantata for children – *Meie Aed (Our Garden)*. In the following year, he started experimenting with aspects of serialism and, later, with combining several styles in one piece. Although the Soviet authorities criticized his experimental music, he continued to compose serial works until 1968. After that he stopped composing for almost eight years. During this self-imposed compositional silence, he immersed himself in the intensive study of medieval and Renaissance music, for example, Gregorian chant, the music of Machaut, Ockeghem and Josquin. He eventually developed a distinctive compositional style, which he calls the “tintinnabuli style.” *Für Alina* (1976), a short piano solo, was his first tintinnabuli work. Literally, “tintinnabulum” is the Latin for “small tinkling bell.” As suggested by its title, the style was inspired by the sound of bells. In this unique musical process, Pärt sought to layer tonal voices and privilege the notes of one triad in each work, in order to express his emotional and aesthetic fascination with particular timbres.

The purpose of this study is to examine Pärt's use of timbre in three representative tintinnabuli works: *Für Alina* for solo piano, *De Profundis* for male voice choir, organ and percussion, and *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten* for string orchestra and bell. Through the detailed study of these selected works, it becomes clear that Pärt's compositional philosophy and the entire structure of his tintinnabuli music is essentially rooted in the timbre of bells and his preference for purity.

論文摘要

Timbre and Tintinnabulation in the Music of Arvo Pärt

王凱詩

音樂系哲學碩士論文

香港中文大學 (二零零一年六月)

愛沙尼亞作曲家柏茲 (1935 年生) 從小已熱愛音樂。他在塔林音樂學院隨愛那 (1887-1970) 學習作曲，於 1963 年畢業。他於 1959 年創作的一套兒童清唱劇，為他贏取了第一個獎項。從 1960 年起，他嘗試運用音列風格及其他實驗性的作曲技巧。可惜，這些作品並沒有帶給他更多讚賞，相反只惹來蘇維埃政府的不滿及批評。從 1968 年起，他暫停其創作曲生涯。取而代之的是一段長達八年的沉寂時期。其間，柏茲並沒有放棄音樂，他埋首於研究中古及文藝復興音樂。透過研究這些早期音樂，他領略到簡樸的美，從而啟發了他以後的創作理念。於 1976 年，他發表了《給愛蓮娜》。這是他第一首關於鐘聲 (Tintinnabuli) 風格的作品。從字面看來，這個湛新的風格與鐘有莫大關係。雖然柏茲及後的一些作品都有採用鐘，但其實鐘的回響聲才是整個風格的關鍵。他運用了多層的有調性旋律及單一和弦，模仿鐘的回響聲。透過仔細分析柏茲的鋼琴小品《給愛蓮娜》、取材自聖詠，給男聲、管風琴及敲擊樂器的《由深淵呼主吟》、和譜給弦樂的《為紀念布烈頓而作的旋律》，本作者領會到柏茲的寫作理論，以及其作品的結構，都是以充滿着無窮變化的鐘聲作為基礎。

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Michael E. McClellan, for his patient guidance and kind encouragement. I also wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to Professor Harrison Ryker. His guidance throughout the course of this degree program has been inspiring. My personal thanks go to my friends Elbbi Fan, Lulu Chiu and Kar Man Ho for their support.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One. Historical Perspective	
Political Cultural and Background of Estonia	6
Arvo Pärt: A Biographical Sketch	10
Stylistic Changes	
Early Tonal Works	14
Pärt's Serial Technique	16
Chapter Two. Tintinnabuli Style and Its Timbre	
The Inert Period	18
The Influence of Early Music on Pärt	20
The Principle of the Tintinnabuli Method	22
The Importance of Bells to Pärt's Tintinnabulation	27
Chapter Three. Analyses of Tintinnabuli Compositions	
<i>Für Alina</i>	30
<i>Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten</i>	38
<i>De Profundis</i>	45
Conclusion	53
Bibliography	55

Introduction

Over the course of the twentieth century, there was rapid development in all the arts. Although World War I disrupted this development, the twenty-year interlude between World Wars I and II served as a period of consolidation. Directly after World War II there was a startling outburst of creative activity in avant-garde music. Composers sought to open up musical parameters like tone colour and rhythm—or more broadly, musical sonority and musical time. The boundary of common practice Western harmony no longer governed modern music. It was believed that the only consistent way forward was to abolish harmony completely.

The development of new musical procedures was a common phenomenon during the twentieth century. Though perhaps not intentional, many composers showed a preference for complex and intricate pieces, which inevitably sounded strange to most listeners. One of the drawbacks of the search for complexity by these composers was the alienation of audiences from the music. Thus, while professing that the primary purpose of music making was communication between composer and listener, some composers failed to accomplish this basic goal. The ceaseless search for intricacy in musical syntax regarded as a reaction to the traditional harmonic language, pushed average listeners away from the music itself.

Whether or not they believed in an intrinsic human desire for simplicity, some composers eventually discarded the complex style and developed a new simplicity, which freed them from the risk of alienating the general public. In the mid-1970s, one of these composers, the Estonian Arvo Pärt (b. 1935),

developed a personal approach to composition, which he calls the “tintinnabuli style.” Literally, “tintinnabulum” is the Latin for “small tinkling bell.”¹ Although the music he wrote after 1976 occasionally includes chiming bells, it seems that Pärt uses the term primarily in an abstract and symbolic way. As he has stated:

I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence comforts me. ... I build with the most primitive materials – with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of the triad are like bells. And that is why I called [my style] tintinnabulation.²

Because Pärt will construct entire works of music around a single triad, he has been called a minimalist. The adoption of minimalist musical resources produced a new simplicity that characterizes the tintinnabuli style.

Political and Cultural Background

Pärt is one of the few contemporary Estonian composers to have gained international recognition. In the past century, Estonia underwent dramatic political change. It became an independent nation after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, but came under the rule of the Soviet Union in 1940. Nevertheless, the period of independence from 1917 to 1940 provided Estonian musicians with an opportunity to develop a national musical culture. The compositions of Eduard Tubin (1905-1982) bear marvelous witness to the spirit of that time, during which Estonian elements were blended with modern Western idioms.

¹ Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

After coming under Soviet authority in 1940, an artist's union supervised all cultural activities, and creative freedom in Estonia was suppressed. For example, twelve-tone technique, which Pärt made use of early in his career, was deemed unacceptable. Nonetheless, Pärt continued to compose serial works until 1968 when he finished his *Credo*. After that he composed almost nothing for the next eight years, and began studying the music of the past, especially sacred music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.³

Pärt's study of early music during the 1970s triggered a transformation of his musical thought. Simultaneously, it rekindled his faith in religion, which served as another catalyst to the dramatic shift in his musical style. He joined the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1970s, and the spirit of Russian Orthodoxy and Orthodox music have influenced him ever since. Indeed, Pärt's craving for simplicity is rooted in his religious belief.

The Principle of Pärt's Tintinnabuli Style

At a certain level, Pärt employs "tintinnabuli" style in order to express his emotional and aesthetic fascination with particular timbres; however, this is not the only way to explain the term "tintinnabuli." To Pärt, "tintinnabuli" is a unique musical process, a kind of compositional system created by him. In it, he sought to layer tonal voices and to privilege the notes of one triad in each work. His static harmonies are then set against repetitive rhythmic patterns.

³ After 1968, Pärt wrote only two works, the *Third Symphony* (1971) and *Laul Armastatule*, which was withdrawn, before the appearance of his first tintinnabuli composition in 1976.

Für Alina (1976), a short piano solo, was his first tintinnabuli work. It also marks the end of the period of creative silence mentioned above. Among his tintinnabuli works, *Fratres* and *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten* are the most distinguished and are frequently performed. *Fratres* remains one of the most illustrious early works, which the composer has arranged numerous times.

The Cultivation of Pärt's Tintinnabuli Style

In order to assess Pärt's style, it is necessary to consider the history of Estonia in this century and the composer's religious beliefs. They are inseparable from the musical thought of Pärt in general and informed the development of his tintinnabuli style in particular. Therefore, the present thesis will briefly examine the cultural and political environment of Estonia in which Pärt wrote his early tintinnabuli works. It will be followed by an account of how Pärt processed and assimilated elements from medieval and Renaissance music within his own tintinnabuli style.

Paul Hillier's *Arvo Pärt*, the most complete and comprehensive study of Pärt and his music, offers an overview of the composer and his compositions. Nonetheless, because Hillier surveys all of Pärt's music, he is unable to analyze every work in detail. Moreover, much of his monograph focuses on matters of pitch and rhythm; less emphasis is placed on the importance of timbre to tintinnabuli style. Tone colour is an essential part of Pärt's music that needs to be considered seriously. The main portion of this thesis will be devoted to an investigation of Pärt's use of timbre in three representative tintinnabuli works: *Für*

Alina for solo piano, *De Profundis* for male voice choir, organ and percussion, and *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten* for string orchestra and bell. These works have received limited scholarly attention and deserve closer examination.

Chapter One. Historical Perspective

Cultural and Political Background of Estonia

For long periods of time, Estonia was under foreign dominion, though it has occasionally enjoyed short spells of independence. As early as 1208, when German crusaders invaded Estonia, this Baltic country has suffered foreign invasion and political unrest. At different times, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Sweden and Russia had assumed sovereignty over it. In the twentieth century, Estonia first enjoyed independence after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. This period did not last long; Estonia was made part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1940. For more than forty years, except for a temporary occupation by Nazi Germany in 1941-44, it remained under Soviet control. With the break up of U.S.S.R. in 1991, Estonia again declared its independence.¹

For a long period of time, native Estonian music was solely a part of peasant culture.² During the nineteenth century, the educated middle class grew and brought traditional European art music to the attention of other Estonians. As a result, the influx of European art music enabled and accelerated the growth

¹ For information concerning Estonia's history see David Arter, *Parties and Democracy in the Post-Soviet Republics: The Case of Estonia* (England: Dartmouth, 1996); William H Bergquist, *Freedom! Narratives of Change in Hungary and Estonia* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994); John Niden and Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1991); Harry Olt, *Estonian Music* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1980).

² Harry Olt, *Estonian Music* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1980), 21.

of Estonian symphonic music. In the late nineteenth century, three Estonian professional musicians, namely, Johannes Kappel, Konstantin Türnpu and Miina Härma, started their careers after graduating from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The growth in the popularity of Estonian art music was further stimulated by the appearance of the first Estonian musical publication *Laulu Ja Mängu Leht* (*Song and Play Paper*) in 1881-97.³

The first Estonian symphonic overtures appeared in the late nineteenth century: *Julius Caesar* by Rudolf Tobias in 1896, *Don Carlos* by Artur Kapp in 1899, and *Dalevala* by Aleksander Läte in 1901. Like Tobias and Kapp, many of the Estonian musicians were educated at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

After independence in 1918, Estonians continued to develop a national music. As part of the growth of Estonian nationalism, various music schools were established including the Tallinn Conservatory and the Higher School of Music of Tartu. Founded in 1919, they provided formal musical training to Estonians. The success of composers like Tobias, Kapp and Heino Eller lies foremost in their assimilation of Estonian folk music within Western European genres. Among the musicians educated locally, Eduard Tubin was the most prominent. In particular, he gained fame within the realm of twentieth-century symphonic music.

These favorable conditions changed after the conquest of Estonia by the Soviet Union in 1940. As with all cultural activities, the Soviet Union stringently regulated musical life in Estonia. Eventually and inevitably this system caused an exodus of musically educated Estonians. Tubin moved to

³ Ibid., 32.

Sweden, while Udo Kasemts and Kaljo Raid emigrated to Canada. Being a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, cultural activity was monitored by various artists' unions.⁴ The history of these unions dates from the Party Resolution of 1932, when the Composer's Unions were launched in Soviet Republics to regulate and supervise music output. All new works, either finished or partly finished, had to be submitted to the Union for approval. The committee comprised composers and musicologist-critics who were responsible for making comments, often severe, that guided young composers, making sure that their compositions complied with the political guidelines established by the Composers' Union. The essence of the guidelines was that all works should follow the goal of socialist realism. The Composers' Union tried to translate this concept into musical terms as follows:

The main attention of the Soviet composer must be directed towards the victorious progressive principles of reality, towards all that is heroic, bright, and beautiful. This distinguishes the spiritual world of Soviet man and must be embodied in musical images full of beauty and strength. Socialist Realism demands an implacable struggle against folk-negating modernistic directions that are typical of the decay of contemporary bourgeois art, against subservience and servility towards modern bourgeois culture.⁵

Any modernistic direction was associated with formalism. Although formalist music was only vaguely defined as that which "people don't understand at first hearing,"⁶ it was indisputably recognized as the opposite of the music of socialist realism, which remained the ultimate goal and

⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁵ Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-81* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 114.

⁶ Ibid., 115.

unquestioned truth of the Soviet Party's aesthetic policy. From the 1930s until the disintegration of Soviet Union, Russian composers continued to write music accordingly. Anyone who failed to comply with the dictates of the statute was labeled a formalist and was associated with bourgeois decadence. Dmitri Shostakovich was a notable example of a composer who deviated from official policy and was severely criticized as a result. His opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1930-32, rev. 1934)⁷ and three of his late works were condemned for their failure to comply with Soviet aesthetics.⁸ As a result, Shostakovitch and other composers including Prokofiev altered their creative process, and strove to confine themselves to the boundaries set forth by the Party in order to avoid political controversy.

The death of Stalin in 1953 brought an end to his cult of personality and the most stringent forms of censorship. However, many of the guidelines imposed by the Party during the Stalinist era remained intact. In 1948, before Stalin died, Russian composer Tikhon Khrennidov had been elected the head of the Composers' Union in 1948 under the supervision of Andrei Zhdanov, and he continued to suppress musical formalism long after that date. Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Party maintained its strict oversight over compositional style.

⁷ Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* enjoyed initial success at its première in 1934. However in 1936, it was criticized and withdrawn due to a change of policy. It was later revised and renamed *Materina Izmailova*. Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia 1917-1970* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972).

⁸ They were the *Violin Concerto No. 1* (1947-48), *String Quartet No. 4* (1949), and the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* (1948)

Arvo Pärt: A Biographical Sketch

Arvo Pärt was born on 11 September 1935, in Paide, a small town that is near Tallinn. He was the only son of his parents, who divorced when he was only three. His mother, a kindergarten teacher, and his stepfather were responsible for raising Pärt. Subsequently, they moved to Rakvere where Pärt lived until he left Estonia in 1980. In Paide, Pärt recalled, he had no access to music, even at home. The most he could do was to sing. Not until the family settled in Rakvere did he have an opportunity to learn music. There the family had a grand piano, on which the young Pärt first tried his hand at composition:

We had a huge concert grand, but it was in such poor condition that we almost disposed of it. When I was seven or eight, I started taking piano lessons. It wasn't very satisfying, as the middle register of the grand was broken. So I played the notes of the low and high registers only. I combined reality with phantasy this way. When I grew up, I exchanged the hammers in order to tackle the middle register, but the action didn't work as evenly as it should have because the hammers didn't fit properly at every point. At that time I composed a lot for the piano.⁹

Clearly even as a young child Pärt was creative and imaginative. The poor condition of the old Russian grand did not discourage him from making music. On the contrary, he was fascinated by the odd sound of the instrument and started experimenting on this piano by using only the extreme registers. Pärt's transformation of the instrument's deficiencies into a strength prefigured his subsequent fascination with colour. His discovery of tone colour, however, was not an end in itself; it was a preview of his life-long search for the factors

⁹ Martin Elste, "An Interview with Arvo Pärt," *Fanfare* 11 (March/April 1988): 338.

that would govern his compositional style and philosophy. In addition to exploring the defective old piano at home, Pärt received piano lessons at a children's music school. Organized by the government, these children's music schools were a kind of supplementary education to the general school curriculum. They offered a seven-year evening program of specialized musical training. The aim of this program was to provide music classes of a standard beyond that found in general education schools to children from the age of six. More importantly, it permitted those gifted students who intended to further their studies at higher music institutions to receive intensive, professional music lessons.¹⁰

The supplementary musical education Pärt received laid a solid foundation for his study at the Music Middle School in Tallinn from 1954 to 1958. Harri Otsa (b.1926), an Estonian composer whose music makes special reference to Estonian folk music, was one of Pärt's many teachers there. During his years at the Music Middle School, Pärt received training in composition, theory, piano, analysis and folk music. Two-years of required service in the army and a serious kidney illness did interrupt Pärt's study but without stopping him from pursuing his goal. After Pärt returned from the military service, he continued his study of composition under the tutelage of Veljo Tormis (b. 1930).

After entering the Music Middle School, Pärt showed an extraordinary talent for music, especially in the area of composition. Writing music, in one

¹⁰ For more information about the childrens music schools of the Soviet Union, please refer to Daniel Robert Remeta, "Music Education in the U.S.S.R." (D.M.A. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1974), 103-134.

sense, was an easy task for him. In particular, adopting new ideas, or handling all sort of Western avant-garde techniques was not difficult for him. Moreover, he had a good sense of musical time, an undeniable advantage for a composer.¹¹

In 1957, Pärt graduated from the Music Middle School and advanced to the Tallinn Conservatory, the most prestigious music institution in Estonia. Following his arrival at the conservatory, Heino Eller, a prominent musician who taught composition there, took the young composer under his wing and became his mentor. During Pärt's years at the conservatory, Eller not only taught him but also inspired him profoundly. Eller had spent almost fifty years guiding young Estonian composers. Indeed, Eduard Tubin was one of his most outstanding students. Pärt was lucky enough to have met Eller who was already in his seventies at that time. Instead of restricting the student's creativity and insisting on rules imposed by the Soviet Party, Eller expanded Pärt's horizons by encouraging him to explore his own interests as well as "forbidden" ideas from the West. Of course, Pärt benefited remarkably from this rather liberal attitude. When examining the stylistic changes in Pärt's music, the influence of this open-minded teacher becomes apparent. Pärt has praised Eller, saying that "he gave me a path, but this path was very broad. He didn't push in any direction, he supported you even if what you wrote wasn't exactly like his credo."¹²

Soon after enrolling in the conservatory, Pärt was employed by Estonian Radio as a recording engineer. The job at the radio station continued even after

¹¹ Hillier, 27-29.

¹² Nick Kimberley, "Starting from Scratch." *Gramophone* 17, no. 880 (1996): 14.

his graduation from the Tallinn Conservatory in 1963. But more often, Pärt worked as a composer writing commissioned works for local theatre and film companies.¹³

Pärt enjoyed his first success in 1962. He won the All-Union Composers' competition for young composers with two compositions.¹⁴ These works brought him the recognition of the Soviet Party. But though he gained official approval, it must not be supposed that he was now free to employ any compositional techniques in his future work. Already in 1960 he had been severely criticized by the Party. The censure mainly concerned his use of Western serial technique. The Party considered this experimental musical idiom to be formalistic, and as such in violation of the spirit of socialist realism. Nevertheless, Pärt held firm and produced a number of serial compositions in the 1960s. Only after the politically controversial public performance of his *Credo* in 1968, did he give up serial technique.¹⁵ By that time, the Soviet Union no longer rejected the use of serial technique. However, it was the liturgical title that the authorities deplored. Although *Credo* was performed once (due to an oversight on the part of the authorities) and was well received at its première, this work was not allowed to be performed again for more than a decade.¹⁶ The experience was a painful disappointment to Pärt.

Following the ban on *Credo*, Pärt entered the darkest period of his life. He undertook an extended period of self-imposed creative silence in which he

¹³ Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 29-29.

¹⁴ The children's cantata *Meie Aed* (1959), and the oratorio *Maailna Samm* (1961).

¹⁵ In *Credo*, Pärt used serial technique and collage for the last time.

¹⁶ Hillier, 58.

composed nothing except a few transitional works like *Symphony No. 3*. Instead of composing, he immersed himself in the study of early music. Inspired by his study of this repertoire and his rekindled faith in Russian Orthodoxy, Pärt transformed his musical aesthetics and developed his unique compositional procedure, that is, tintinnabulation. It continues to be his principal style. The first product of his new approach to composition, *Für Alina* [*Aliinale*], appeared in 1976.

Although Pärt continued to be criticized by Soviet musical authorities, the public welcomed his new technique. This situation ultimately triggered his decision to leave Estonia. He and his wife who was a Soviet Jew and eligible for emigration had passed up an opportunity to leave the country in the early 1970s, but by the end of the decade they had changed their minds. To escape creative limits being imposed upon him by others, Pärt and his wife left Estonia in 1980. They first settled in Austria, but eventually in 1982, they moved to Berlin.

Stylistic Changes: Early Tonal Work

According to Daniel Robert Remeta, music taught in Soviet conservatories was limited to the common practice period, with only passing mention of early twentieth-century music of the West.¹⁷ Moreover, as mentioned

¹⁷ Remeta, 103-134.

earlier, the Soviet Party, which ruled Estonia at this time, would not tolerate contemporary Western influence and tried to impose austere measures on creative freedom, making sure that the output of their composers complied explicitly with socialist realism. Although Pärt's earliest works were not available to me for in-depth study, according to Schwarz's description, his *Meie Aed* and *Maailma Samm* seem to have the attributes of a socialist work.

Schwarz described these prize-winning compositions as follows:

Prizes were awarded, and the recipients - though within the age limit of thirty-five - were already known by reputation: Grabovsky, Shchedrin, Tamberg, Pyart [Pärt], Pakhmutova, Oganesyan. There were no major surprises; in fact, the music heard at these concerts revealed a prevailing sameness of technical approach and a lack of musical adventurousness. It was 'establishment' music, carefully screened by local officials and cleansed of all auspicious newness.¹⁸

From the above description, there are sufficient hints for us to guess that these works of Pärt, together with works from the same time, for example, *Sonatina Op. 1*, were written in tonal style.

Stephen K. Wright has presented a general account of Pärt's *Toccatina* and *Fughetta*, which was originally intended as part of a larger work, *Partita* (1958) for piano.¹⁹ The opening passage has an improvisatory character, which is typical of a toccata. Although the genre was traditional, the musical syntax was rather atonal. This also applies to the *Fughetta*, which has a subject that is tonally ambiguous. In both, Pärt endeavored to create patterns of increasing complexity and dissonance within a traditional idiom.

¹⁸ Schwarz, 360.

¹⁹ Stephen K Wright, "Stylistic Development in the Works of Arvo Pärt, 1958-1985." (Master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1992), 19-20.

In short, he seemed unwilling to slavishly base his music on an approved model. Certainly, *Partita* represented an initial stage of Pärt's advancement as an independent composer. It was his first deviation from the tenets of socialist realism. Ultimately he enlarged his experimentation to encompass the challenges presented by serial music.

Pärt's Serial Technique

While the Soviet Party insisted on condemning formalism and upholding social realism, Pärt continued to explore new musical idioms, particularly dodecaphony and other serial techniques. All of them were symbols of what the Party considered to be anti-humanistic tendencies that should be avoided.

According to Alfred Schnittke, contemporary Western music was rarely available to Soviet students at the conservatory.²⁰ Nonetheless, Pärt benefited from books on serialism by Eimert and Krenek as well as from the limited amount of twelve-tone music (including works by Webern, Boulez and Nono) to which he had access. Pärt subsequently engaged himself in writing serial and collage music.

Pärt embarked on an exploration of Western serial technique with *Nekrolog* (1960), an orchestral piece. It should come as no surprise that Pärt's

²⁰ Claire Polin, "Interviews with Soviet Composers," *Tempo* No.151 (December 1984), 10.

departure from socialist realism received the Party's censure. Khrennikov, the head of the Composers' Union criticized his use of formalistic elements:

A work like Pyart's [Pärt's] *Obituary* [*Nekrolog*] makes it quite clear that the twelve-tone experiment is untenable. This composition is dedicated to the memory of the victims of Fascism, but it bears the characteristics of the productions of foreign 'avant-gardists' ...²¹

It was at this juncture that Pärt cultivated his own composition philosophy called "constructive thinking."²² Constructive thinking is based on "systematic additive/reductive process,"²³ which is not only found in his early serial work, but also applies to his later 'tintinnabuli' compositions. This process produces melodies that grow and contract incrementally according to rules established by the composer for each composition.

²¹ Schwarz, 346.

²² For more information about "constructive thinking," please refer to Harry Olt, *Estonian Music* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1980), 40.

²³ Wright, 23.

Chapter Two. Tintinnabuli style and its timbre

The Inert Period

As Pärt came to maturity in the 1960s, the musical climate of the Soviet Union did not favor the use of serial technique or other new Western musical idioms in composition. Nonetheless, he persisted in writing serial and experimental music for more than ten years. Soviet critics frowned on his continued interest in what they considered to be formalistic music. Even under such circumstances, he was not deterred. *Credo*, completed in 1968, was the last work of Pärt's serial period, and it marked the start of an extended period of self-imposed silence that lasted almost eight years.

From 1968 to 1976, with the exception of a couple of transitional works, Pärt gave up writing serious concert music. However, as a means of earning a living, he devoted part of his time to writing film music. With his remaining time and energy, he immersed himself in the study of early music. Pärt first encountered plainchant by mere chance in 1969. He soon became acquainted with more music from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and eagerly undertook a detailed study of it. As a result, he gained an appreciation for medieval and Renaissance music that influenced works like *Symphony No. 3* (1971) and the symphonic cantata *Laul Armastatule* (1973), which temporarily broke his creative silence. These were encouraging signs because they indicated that

Pärt's silence during 1968-1976 had not exhausted his will to explore new musical styles and techniques.

Pärt's *Symphony No. 3* was composed in 1971 and dedicated to the Estonian conductor Neeme Järvi. His desire to make a change in compositional direction is evident in his adoption of a chant-like melody, cadential demarcations that imitate Renaissance practice, and the use of organum. Although Pärt's invocation of early music was deliberate, he did not intend to produce a parody of earlier styles. Rather, he developed these borrowed materials within the framework of a twentieth-century symphonic work. A similar method was used in his cantata *Laul Armastatule*, but Pärt has since withdrawn that composition, making a detailed comparison impossible at this time.¹

After *Laul Armastatule*, Pärt did not compose again until 1976, when his tintinnabuli style was born. Although Pärt has not discussed the reasons why he stopped writing serious music, his decision is understandable. In the middle of the 1960s, Pärt became disillusioned with twelve-tone technique, and he sought a new approach to composition. He tried collage and quotation, but unfortunately, this offered him only a temporary solution. Questions of colour, originality, and spirituality, continued to plague him even after his attempts at combining serial and collage methods. He had to stop composing because that was the only way of refraining from making music in which he no longer believed.

¹ For more information about Pärt's *Symphony No.3*, please refer to Hillier, 68-73.

The Influence of Early Music on Pärt

Credo and its preceding works found Pärt, if not in a cul-de-sac, at least on a road that had temporarily become impassable. He fell into a compositional crisis. Although he had received intermittent criticism from high government circles ever since *Nekrolog* appeared, he had never felt personally frustrated with his music before. Now, he was deeply concerned with the limitations inherent in his own compositional method. His encounter with early music coincided with this period of inner uncertainty and provided him with a solution.²

It is not surprising that Pärt, who was educated while Estonia was in the Soviet Union, only came across Gregorian chant in 1968-69, when he was nearly thirty. The Soviet Union made every effort to control the religious beliefs of its people and actively discouraged organized religion. As a result of this effort, sacred music from earlier periods was deliberately removed from music school syllabi; only secular music was taught. In this way, Pärt was deprived of contact with the world of early music:

I had an intuitive feeling that this music was very good, but I had no access to it, as it was not included in our education. Therefore it was not so much a case of simply studying or reading. One had to go a very roundabout way in order to find out about other areas of music.³

² Hillier, 77-79.

³ Jamie McCarthy, "An Interview with Arvo Pärt," *Musical Times* 130 (March 1989): 132.

The beauty of the Gregorian chant fascinated Pärt. He soon found a 10-minute recording of a mass and a copy of the *Liber usualis* in a Catholic Church in Tallinn.⁴ He enthusiastically took up the study of music from early periods, beginning with the Notre Dame School, Machaut, the ars nova; and then moving on to works by Ockeghem, Obrecht, Josquin, Palestrina and Victoria.⁵ Thus, Pärt's familiarity with early music was not confined to monophonic music, but encompassed polyphonic works, too.

After his acquaintance with early music, Pärt's life would never be the same again. Using Gregorian chant as his inspiration, he began composing bare, single line melodies, and tried to "learn how to walk again as a composer;" in order to "speak" naturally with a "foreign language," he embarked on writing numerous chant-like melodies, until he felt that they were his own.⁶ He realized immediately that these exercises would serve as an impetus for the establishment of a new style, as well as a means for precise expressive ends. The *Symphony No. 3* and *Laul Armastatule* testify to his will to exploit a new style with a spirit that resembles that of the early music he studied.⁷

⁴ Roman Brotbeck and Roland Wächter. "Lernen, die Stille zu hören: Ein Gespräch mit dem estnischen Komponisten Arvo Pärt" *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 151, no. 3 (1990): 14-15.

⁵ Hillier, 79.

⁶ Hillier, 74.

⁷ Hillier, 64-74.

The Principle of the Tintinnabuli Method

In contrast to his early works, all of Pärt's tintinnabuli music employs only one tonality, or more precisely, each piece uses a single tonal center and only one triad. Thus, although Pärt's music is tonal and triadic, he makes no effort to conform to the rules governing common-practice harmony. His tintinnabuli music bears little similarity to music of the common-practice period. In this sense, the application of the term tonal is not appropriate for his tintinnabuli music. According to Pärt:

One can only conditionally call my music tonal. It cannot be identified with the classical theory of tonality. One can speak rather of a global application of the major or minor triad.⁸

Lacking the tension and release formed by triadic progressions, tintinnabuli music sounds static, but it also gives an impression of spaciousness that is produced by wide ranges and constant motion. This is already implied by the label tintinnabuli itself:

This word refers to the ringing of bells, music in which the sound materials are in constant flux, though the overall image is one of stasis, of constant recognition.⁹

⁸ "Meine Musik kann man nur bedingt als tonal bezeichnen. Sie läßt sich nicht mit dem klassischen Begriff der tonalen Musik identifizieren. Man kann eher von einer globalen Anwendung des Dur-Moll Dreiklangs sprechen." Lothar Mattner, "Arvo Pärt: *Tabula rasa*," *Melos* 47 (February 1985): 98.

⁹ Paul Hillier, "Arvo Pärt – Magister Ludi," *Musical Times* 130 (March 1989): 134.

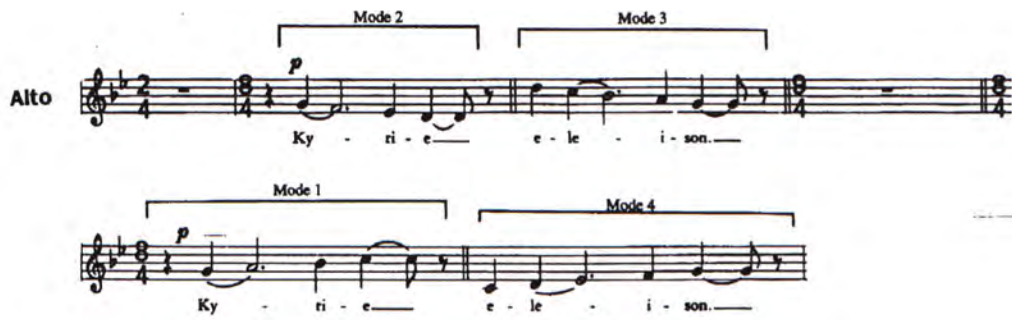
Melodic voices

Tintinnabuli music is characterized by its fundamental two-part texture, comprising a melodic voice, and a tintinnabuli voice. The melodic voice is essentially based on step-wise motion, moving towards or away from a tonal center. One should bear in mind that in Pärt's tintinnabuli music the term tonal center refers to the pitch class on which the key triad is built.

Under the tintinnabuli principle, the melodic voice proceeds or unfolds systematically. It is the result of a continuous expansion and/or contraction of the melodic line. Various forms of melodic voices are possible. The simplest form is a scale pattern moving in step-wise motion. Other individual forms evolved from this basic one: melodic voices with reiterated pitches, or scale patterns with leaps or melodic twists.

Hillier has categorized these melodic voices in four different modes.¹⁰ The first and second modes move away from the tonal center, but in opposite directions. The third and fourth modes move towards the tonal center from opposite directions. As an example, the opening of the Kyrie of Pärt's *Berliner Messe* employs all four modes, using G as the tonal center (example 2.1):

¹⁰ Hillier, 95.



Example 2.1 *Berliner Messe* , Kyrie, bars 1-6.

Tintinnabuli Voices

The subordinate, supporting voice of the two-part texture is called the tintinnabuli voice. This tintinnabuli voice uses exclusively the three notes of the fundamental triad of each composition. With reference to the position of the melodic voice, the tintinnabuli voice can be arranged in three different ways: above the melodic voice, below it, or alternating between the two positions. The tintinnabuli voice moves in parallel motion to the melodic voice, and the melodic line determines the contour of the tintinnabuli voice. An upper tintinnabuli voice appears as the closest note of the fundamental triad above the melodic note (example 2.2). Unisons with the melodic voice are avoided. Following the same procedure, a lower tintinnabuli voice sounds the closest note of the fundamental triad below the melodic note (example 2.3). The alternating tintinnabuli voice combines the upper and lower tintinnabuli voice in

succession, thus forming a tintinnabuli voice that interweaves with the melodic voice (example 2.4). All of these three types employ close-position, broken triads as the basis of the tintinnabuli voice. Using tintinnabuli notes not in a triadic close position produces something Hillier refers to as the second position tintinnabuli voice (example 2.5).¹¹

The image shows a musical score for two recorders. The top staff is labeled 'Soprano Recorder' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Alto Recorder'. Both staves are in 4/4 time and D minor (one flat). The Soprano Recorder part consists of a series of eighth notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5, C6, D6. The Alto Recorder part consists of a series of eighth notes: D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, Bb3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5. Vertical dashed lines connect the notes in pairs, showing the close-position broken triads. A dashed line connects the final notes of both staves.

Upper tintinnabuli voice in close position (Alto Recorder)

Example 2.2 *Arbos* (D-minor triad as the fundamental triad), bars 1-2.

The image shows a musical score for two recorders. The top staff is labeled 'Soprano Recorder' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Tenor Recorder'. Both staves are in 4/4 time and D minor (one flat). The Soprano Recorder part consists of a series of eighth notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5, C6, D6. The Tenor Recorder part consists of a series of eighth notes: D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, Bb3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5. Vertical dashed lines connect the notes in pairs, showing the close-position broken triads. A dashed line connects the final notes of both staves. Above the first measure of the Soprano Recorder staff, the tempo/meter marking '(4+2+4+2)' is written.

Lower tintinnabuli voice in close position (Soprano Recorder)

Example 2.3 *Arbos* (D-minor triad as the fundamental triad), bars 1-2.

¹¹ Hillier, 94.

Soprano

Alto

Ky - ri - e - e - le - i - son.

Alternating tintinnabuli voice in close position (Soprano)

Example 2.4 *Berliner Messe* (G-minor triad as the fundamental triad), bars 5-6.

(8+4)

Tenor Recorder

Bass Recorder

5

Upper tintinnabuli voice in second position (Tenor Recorder)

Example 2.5a *Arbos* (D-minor triad as the fundamental triad), bars 1-6.



Lower tintinnabuli voice in second position (Bass Recorder)

Example 2.5b *Arbos* (D-minor triad as the fundamental triad), bars 1-2.

The Importance of Bells to Pärt's Tintinnabulation

Before analyzing examples of Pärt's tintinnabuli music in detail, it might be worthwhile to consider some of the general features of bell sound, and its link to Pärt's conception of tintinnabulation. The history of bells in the West can be traced back to the ancient world. Bells were rung to provide an accompaniment for dancing or to signal the commencement of religious activities. Eventually, the ringing of bells proved to be inseparable from certain religious associations. In the Middle Ages, bell ringing in churches was a common means of announcing the daily offices. The function of bells for marking time was, in this way, transformed into a spiritual summons for the worshippers. Church bells

assumed a solemn and meditative sound quality that inspired the faithful, guiding them to worship God.¹²

The intrinsic and mysterious power of sounding bells is abstract and to some extent beyond our comprehension. However, it seems reasonable to assume that this sonorous timbre partly contributes to the association of these instruments with pure and contemplative properties. From a physical point of view, the nature of a bell's sound is due mainly to the layering of numerous partials or overtones. These partials are based on different pitches and have different times of decay, depending on the materials, shape, thickness and size of the bell.¹³ When a bell is struck, the pitch that sounds most prominently is called the fundamental. The pitch approximately an octave lower than the fundamental is referred to as the hum note; it lasts longer than any other partial. Two other partials above the fundamental are named the quint and the tierce. They sound at about the interval of a fifth and a minor tenth above the fundamental. If these pitches are collapsed within a single octave, they produce a minor triad.¹⁴

Knowing these basic properties of the sound production of bells helps us understand Pärt's tintinnabuli music. They significantly influenced Pärt's compositional philosophy and his cultivation of the unique tintinnabuli style. Hillier, an important advocate of Pärt's music, has put forward a similar idea.¹⁵

¹² Edward V Williams, *The Bells of Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 20-27.

¹³ Hillier, 20-21.

¹⁴ For the discussion of the physical properties of bells, see Percival Price, "Bell", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 3, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Grove, 2001), 169-171.

¹⁵ Hillier, 18-23.

As its name suggests, tintinnabulation owes much to the colour of bells. The layered, slowly decaying sound of bells inspired the composer. Pärt's choice of a single minor triad, and the use of a perpetually contracting and/or releasing procedure are evidence of his imitation of the sound of bells, or more precisely reflects his attempt to rework the beauty of the resonance of bells in his compositions. Given the association of bells with religious ritual, the minor triad appears to possess a spiritual meaning for him as well.

Chapter Three. Analyses of Tintinnabuli compositions

Pärt's unique tintinnabuli style is closely related to the timbre of bells. In order to show how he manipulates the tintinnabuli procedure to articulate the images of bells, detailed analyses of compositions with different performing forces are presented in this chapter. The three early works selected for study show different approaches to the interpretation of the timbre and perception of reverberating bells.¹

Für Alina

The extensive eight-year preparation of tintinnabuli style culminated in 1976 with Pärt's composition of *Für Alina*. *Für Alina* is a short piano piece of just fifteen bars and no more than two minutes duration. This piano miniature is dedicated to a twelve-year old Estonian girl, who was living alone in London at that time. A gift to the desolate girl, it was intended to soothe the sadness caused by her solitude. Despite its brevity, *Für Alina* is strikingly novel.

Für Alina is one of Pärt's two tintinnabuli works designated for solo piano. The score of *Für Alina* is simple and gives a clear indication of Pärt's constructive principle at work. The immediate impression the listener has of

¹ For more analyses of Pärt's music, please refer to Reuben F. P. Holcroft, "The Art of Simplicity: Design, Sentiment, and Value in Non-developmental Music: Studies in Works by Satie, Pärt, and Poulenc." (Master's Thesis, University of Otago, 1995); Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Stephen K. Wright, "Stylistic Development in the Works of Arvo Pärt, 1958-1985" (Master's Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1992).

this piece is of an unconcealed simplicity that involves the barest use of notes. Particularly characteristic of tintinnabuli method is the simple two-part texture supported by a pedal note that is held almost throughout the entire piece. There are also elements connecting the work to plainchant and music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. For example, the absence of tempo indication and meter, the use of only one dynamic mark, the use of note heads without stems, and bar lines that merely demarcate the ends of phrases are all features reminiscent of medieval or Renaissance scores. The piece possesses a flexible rhythm without regular accentuation that recalls plainchant and has a texture that reminds one of early polyphony. Pärt's use of these features was inspired by his study of early music.

With the composition of *Für Alina*, Pärt entered a specifically eloquent and austere compositional path, which also served as an act of stylistic liberation. In an oft-quoted explanation of this work, Pärt described it as a revival of the aesthetic tranquillity and purity of which he perceives the minor triad to be an embodiment. It fulfilled his desire for clarity. According to Pärt:

That was the first piece that was on a new plateau. It was here that I discovered the triad series, which I made my simple, little guiding rule.²

What Pärt means by “triad series” is the lower overtones of a bell, that can be collapsed to form a minor triad. Inspired by bells, Pärt found unlimited possibilities within a single minor triad.

² Wolfgang Sandner, program notes to *Arvo Pärt: Tabula rasa*, (CD ECM 1275, 1984), 21.

As the first composition of this new style, *Für Alina* does not possess all the characteristics that are found in later tintinnabuli works, yet it does demonstrate some recognizable characteristics of a typical tintinnabuli work. The music has a simple, two-part texture, with a sustaining pedal note serving as the bass and the foundation of the work. Harmonically the music is constructed from essentially diatonic, triadic material. In spite of that, it does not sound like music of the common practice period, because Pärt chose to rely on only one triad. Therefore, it lacks the sense of direction created by the interaction of different chords.

The upper voice is the melodic voice, and is written using Aeolian mode on B (i.e., the B natural-minor scale) (example 3.1). Its movement is mostly stepwise but with some leaps. Unlike the basic tintinnabuli method outlined in chapter 2, this melodic voice refers less clearly to the tonal center than in Pärt's mature tintinnabuli works. In *Für Alina* Pärt writes the melodic voice freely, without clinging to any specific procedure.³ However, this melody is similar to medieval plainchant, which is modal and free in rhythm. Moreover, like the medieval chant melody, the melody of *Für Alina* is primarily built on the interval of the second, that is, notes mainly move by steps. It is clear that, when Pärt composed *Für Alina*, he had not yet standardized the principle regulating the construction of the melodic voice, which would be subjected to further refinement. In spite of that, there are some parallels to the melodic voices of typical tintinnabuli pieces. Like other mature works the notes of the melodic

³ Hillier, 87.

voice of *Für Alina* moves mainly by step. However, when there is a leap, at least one of the notes involved must be part of the tonic triad (B-minor). By doing so, the quality of one single triad is reinforced without emphasizing notes outside the chosen tonal area. Almost all dissonances found in the melodic voice in this particular work are prepared. They are either auxiliary tones or passing tones. In addition to the stepwise movement of the melodic voice, phrases expand and contract in a fashion that is similar to some mature instrumental tintinnabuli works. Here, Pärt adds one extra note to each phrase. In the second half of the piece, the process is reversed with succeeding phrases being reduced by one note, thus creating a kind of palindrome.

Alcinate
(Für Alina)

ARVID PÄRT
1976.

Спокойно, возмущенно, вслушиваясь

piano *P*

Example 3.1 *Für Alina*, bars 1-5.

The voice below the melodic voice is a lower tintinnabuli voice in close position. Its contour is similar to that of the melodic voice. The tintinnabuli voice is constructed by using only notes of the B-minor triad, with an exception in bar 11 where a C-sharp, alien to the tonic triadic, is unexpectedly introduced (example 3.2). To emphasize this note, Pärt drew a flower sign above this note in the score and has the performer release the damper pedal. Without the additional resonance created by the damper pedal, the C-sharp stands out at this point. In this way, Pärt created a dramatic effect within this short piece of music. Yet the sudden change of colour does not trigger further development; on the contrary, it anticipates the close of this musical miniature.



Example 3.2 *Für Alina*, bars 10-11.

Marked “Calm, exalted, listening to one’s inner self”, the music unfolds slowly and the rhythmic flow proceeds primarily by the addition and subtraction of notes from each phrase. Overall, the music is static; the character being harmonious and homorhythmic, at the same time. Layers of sound intertwine with each other and exist simultaneously against an unchanging background.

In this simple composition, there are clear indications of Pärt’s interest in the sound of bells. It has a rich resonance that parallels the clanging of bells and serves as a crucial feature of the tintinnabuli style. Indeed, timbre seems to have been a decisive factor when Pärt wrote this piano piece. Among the various musical instruments, the range of the piano is nearly the widest. With the assistance of the damper pedal, its strings can be set in vibration, oscillating freely until they come to rest; the strings in the bass section of piano are relatively long, and thus able to generate highly resonant sounds.

Pärt uses two low B’s, separated by two octaves, at the opening of the piece in order to establish B as the pitch center. Acoustically, these two pitches can be associated with the hum tone and fundamental of a bell. Above them other overtones or partials are generated. At the most immediate level, this attack suggests the striking of a bell and invokes the relationship between bell ringing and the tintinnabuli style. Due to the fact that the decay process of a piano is much shorter than that of a bell, however, even with the assistance of damper pedal, the vibration of the strings will not last that long and the overtones will eventually terminate. To deal with this limitation, Pärt uses the tintinnabuli voice to produce sympathetic vibrations that will help prolong the sound.

The pitches of the tintinnabuli voice, the notes outlining the B-minor triad, represent, within the context of this piece, the partials that occur immediately above the fundamental when a bell is struck. These higher partials are referred to as the quint, the nominal, and the tierce. Of course, all musical instruments produce a fundamental and partials. However, it is the tierce that lies a minor tenth (as opposed to a major tenth) above the fundamental that helps to distinguish bells acoustically from other instruments.⁴ Thus, the minor triad that Pärt uses here and in other tintinnabuli works was inspired by the unique timbre of bells. It allows the image of bell ringing to permeate the entire piece. This is because as the melodic voice unfolds, it must be accompanied by the tintinnabuli voice that reminds us of the lower partials of a ringing bell.

Pärt has constructed phrases of irregular length such that one perceives this piece as a freely written composition, without any underlying meter. The expansion and contraction of phrase lengths can be interpreted as parallel to a bell's decay process, which involves the waxing and waning of each partial's strength.⁵ The overall effect is of harmonic stasis in which phrases grow and subside amid the gradual decaying of sound.

The above account explains clearly why Pärt employs only one single triad in his tintinnabuli works. *Für Alina* signifies Pärt's definitive break with his experiments with serialism, creating a new approach to tonality that deviates from the conventions of the common practice period. In common practice, the use of just one triad results in a lack of contrast. However, the function of the

⁴ Percival Price, "Bell", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Grove, 2001), 3: 169-171.

⁵ Paul Hillier, "Arvo Pärt: Magister Ludi," *The Musical Times* 130, no. 1753 (1989): 134.

tintinnabuli voice requires Pärt to employ a single triad in each of his tintinnabuli works. Although these works lack the conventional harmonic variety and contrast that comes from the interplay of different chords, the adoption of one single triad is crucial for creating an association with the pealing of bells.

Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten

Für Alina, the first experiment with the new tintinnabuli style in 1976, was a considerable success. In the following year, Pärt produced more tintinnabuli works. Among them, *Cantus*, is one of Pärt's most distinctive and celebrated compositions in the style. It was premiered at a concert in Tallinn in 1977. As the title suggests, *Cantus* is a personal threnody for Benjamin Britten. The degree to which Britten's musical aesthetics affected Pärt is unknown. In the program notes for this work, Pärt said:

In the past year we have had many losses in the world of music to mourn. Why did the date of Benjamin Britten's death – December 4, 1976 – touch such a chord in me? During this time I was obviously at the point where I could recognize the magnitude of such a loss. Inexplicable feelings of guilt, more than that even, arose in me. I had just discovered Britten for myself. Just before his death I began to appreciate the unusual purity of his music – I had had the impression of the same kind of purity in the ballads of Guillaume de Machaut. And besides, for a long time I had wanted to meet Britten personally – and now it would not come to that.⁶

The purity that he found in Britten's music fascinated Pärt and he was moved to compose this six-minute piece, which is scored for a string ensemble with the addition of a single bell. Instead of adhering to the relatively free structure of a work like *Für Alina*, Pärt relies on the basic principle of tintinnabulation. As result, *Cantus* possesses a more rigid and controlled structure.

⁶Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 103.

Pärt's interest in early music is reflected in *Cantus* through his adoption of mensuration canon. It subsequently became one of his favorite compositional devices. Canon works well with the tintinnabuli principle, because both require strict adherence to a systematic procedure. Compound duple meter (6/4) at a slow tempo provides a gentle flowing feeling that underlies this composition. This piece opens with a statement of a repetitive pattern: a bell is struck every other measure. (example 3.3) After the bell has been struck three times, there are two measures of complete rest. This eight-bar ostinato remains unchanged almost throughout the entire piece. These introductory bars prepare the beginning of the canon for strings. The voices of the five-part canon are divided among the string instruments. With the exception of the violas, each group of strings (Vln. I, Vln. II, Vnc., Cb.) is divided into pairs. One of each pair of instruments plays a melodic voice while the other plays a lower tintinnabuli voice as its accompaniment. (example. 3.4) The violas, which are undivided, also play a melodic voice. The absence of a tintinnabuli voice to accompany the violas may reflect Pärt's concern for orchestral balance.



Example 3.3 *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, bars 1-6.

Example 3.4 *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, bars 7-11.

The melodic voices are constructed according to a simple rule, that is, a process of addition. The first leg of the pattern consists of a statement of the tonic, A. The next leg in the pattern consists of two pitches, A and the G immediately below it. The third leg consists of three pitches, A, G, and F. As the process continues, the melodic voice stretches further and further downwards. Taking the first violin as an example, the melodic voice starts on a'', and at each repetition, one note is added, moving downward to form a continuous scalar line. Accompanying this melodic voice is a lower tintinnabuli voice in first position. It consists only of pitches belonging to the A-minor triad.

(example 3.5) Both voices are set to a regular rhythmic pattern of alternating minims and crotchets that suggests the first mode of thirteenth-century modal rhythm: a note of two units (*longa recta*) followed by a note of one unit (*brevis recta*). Together the two durational values form a perfection.



Example 3.5 *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, bars 7-11.

The remaining voices of this five-part canon follow the same organizational patterns. However, each of the instrumental groups begins one octave lower than the preceding voice, for example, the second violins start on a'' and e''; violas start on a'; cellos start on a and e; double basses start on A and E. The rhythms of every part follow the long-short pattern described above, but the durations are doubled for each successive instrumental group. Thus, the second violins alternate breves and minims, etc. (example 3.4) Each new voice of the five-part canon enters when the previous voice has completed one perfection. The first note of each of the melodic voices clashes with the pitch of

the preceding melodic voice as it enters. The dissonance helps to articulate the entrance of each voice.

After all the instruments have entered, the melodic voices continue to extend downward, creating flowing scalar patterns, until they arrive at their final pitches, which spell the tonic triad (A minor) of *Cantus*. After each instrument arrives at its final pitch, the last leg of the pattern is repeated once and then the instruments sustain their pitches until the end. There is one exception to this process. After the cellos finish and arrive at their final A, the slow-moving double basses move directly to their final pitch A even though they have not completed the process. In doing so, Pärt avoids prolonging the piece unnecessarily. These final pitches are spread out in such a way as to correspond with the five lowest partials produced by a bell. (example 3.6)

17

Camp.

(non diminuendo) *pp*

VI. I div.

VI. II div.

Viole

Vc. div.

Cb. div.

Example 3.6 *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, bars 123-128.

With regard to dynamics, Pärt simply uses an extended crescendo for *Cantus*. Beginning at *ppp*, the music gradually becomes louder, reaching the loudest point (*fff*) when the violins arrive at their final pitch. This dynamic level is sustained and non diminuendo is purposefully indicated on the score. Besides providing musical interest to the work, this dynamic design works as complement that enhances the meaning of the piece as a whole. In order to emphasize the ending of this piece, the instruments maintain the loud dynamic level until the bell has been struck the last time. At that moment all the strings

abruptly stop playing leaving the sound of the bell to fade away slowly, thereby bringing the piece to its conclusion.

The process Pärt used to compose *Cantus* is indebted to the timbre of bells. The structural design of the piece appears to be a recreation of the decay of bell sound, but in reverse. In this way, the final A-minor triad can be understood as the moment of attack. As mentioned above, Pärt carefully spells this final chord so that it contains the five lowest partials of a sounding bell: A1 of the basses represent the hum note; at an octave above it is the A of the cellos, which stands for the fundamental; e in the violas is the quint; a in the second violins denotes the nominal, which is an octave above the fundamental; and the c of the first violins is the tierce. Apart from this arrangement, the superimposition of different layers of the mensuration canon, moving at different speeds but with similar melodic content, creates a broadly static sound that resembles the reverberating partials that are so distinctive of bell sound.

From another perspective, *Cantus* can be interpreted as programmatic, even though the composer has not himself indicated a specific program. To start the piece, Pärt's use of a solo bell, emerging from silence, recalls the function of bell ringing to call clergy to daily services, to mark the hours of the day (and of life), as well as the tolling of bells at funerals. Given the dedication of *Cantus* to Benjamin Britten, it is the latter association that stands out most vividly. Other features that account for the work's funereal nature include the steady slow tempo as well as the use of a minor triad and the descending minor scales. Together, they produce a work of deep seriousness and solemnity.

De Profundis

After completing the large scale *Missa Sillabica* for choir and instrumental ensemble in 1977, Pärt discontinued writing vocal music for about two years. The reason for this decision is unknown, but starting with *De Profundis* (1980) Pärt once again turned to vocal compositions. Indeed this work was the first of a series of successful tintinnabuli works for choir. Although Pärt has composed for a variety of performing forces, it is through choral music that he is best able to express himself.

Scored for a four-part choir of tenors and basses, with organ and percussion (including tamtam, bass drum and E bell), *De Profundis* was the first tintinnabuli work Pärt composed after leaving Estonia in 1980. It is a setting of Psalm 129 [Vulgate numbering]. Pärt adheres to the Latin text almost verbatim. As one of the earlier tintinnabuli works for voice, it uses tintinnabuli procedure in a straightforward manner. Nevertheless, it is unusual in a number of ways: the unusual combination of voices; the highly organized structure; and the suggestion of medieval organum and hocket.

The text is set syllabically, and each voice proceeds in steady minims. Invariably, the first or last syllable of a word is assigned to the tonic; and the remaining syllables are set to a scale that moves in a stepwise fashion either towards or away from this pitch. Words with only one syllable must be on the tonal center. In accordance with the above rule of text setting, there are only four possibilities for setting multisyllabic words. The beginning of *De*

Profundis exemplifies all the possibilities available. Taking E as the tonal center, bass II moves upwards from it; tenor I moves downwards to it; bass I moves upwards to it; and tenor II moves downwards from it. (example 3.7) I will refer to these four patterns for multisyllabic words as modes in the present analysis.

The musical score for the opening of *De Profundis* consists of four staves, each with a different voice part. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = \text{ca } 108$. The lyrics are as follows:

- Bass II:** De pro - fun - dis cla - ma - vi ad te Do - mi - ne:
- Tenor I:** Do - mi - ne ex - au - di vo - cem me - am.
- Bass I:** Fi - ant au - res tu - ae in - ten - den - tes
- Tenor II:** in vo - cem de - pre - ca - ti - o - nis me - ae.

Example 3.7 *De Profundis*, opening.

Pärt skillfully combines the four male voices in order to fit them into a neatly planned structure. (Table 1) It starts with the four male voices entering one by one. Instead of building up the four-part texture by adding layers in a

random order, Pärt designed a plan in which individual voices entered alone, then in pairs, in groups of three and then all together. He pairs voices carefully; various combinations of voices are employed to introduce changing colours to this short sacred work, in which conventional expressive vocal effects are avoided. The exposition of these varying colours is amplified by changing the organ registration each time there is a change in the number of voices singing. Near the end of the piece, however, the process is reversed. Once the seventh verse of the psalm begins, the organ registrations are gradually reduced, in the same order that they were added.

	Verse	Voice(s)	Voice presenting the melodic voice
Part 1	1 a b	Bass II Tenor I	Bass II Tenor I
	2 a b	Bass I Tenor II	Bass I Tenor II
Part 2	3 a b	Bass I & II Tenor I & II	Bass II Tenor I
	4 a b	Tenor II, Bass II Tenor I, Bass I	Bass II Tenor I
Part 3	5 a b	Tenor II, Bass I & II Tenor I & II, Bass I	Bass II Tenor I
	6 a b	Tenor I & II, Bass II Tenor I, Bass I & II	Bass II Tenor I
Part 4	7 a b	Tenor I & II, Bass I & II ``	Bass II Tenor I
	8 a b	Tenor I & II, Bass I & II ``	Bass II Tenor I

Table1: Combinations of voice in *De Profundis*.

Based on the organization of voices, this work can be divided into four clear-cut sections of similar lengths. The first section opens with the basses and

tenors presenting the melodic voice in alternation (Bass II - Tenor I - Bass I - Tenor II). This alternation of bass and tenor voices presenting the melodic voice persists throughout the entire work. In the second section four different combinations of two voices are presented. While the melodic voice is stated in one part, the second voice gives a tintinnabuli voice in second position. (example 3.8) In the third section, all four possible combinations of three voices occur. In addition to the melodic voice and the tintinnabuli voice, there is one extra voice. Pärt makes the third voice an accompanying or subsidiary melodic voice, which moves at the interval of a third above or below the principle melodic voice. (example 3.9) To conclude the piece, all four voices sing simultaneously, resulting in a brilliant climax. Here, the melodic voices, both the principal and the subsidiary, are accompanied by their own tintinnabuli voices. (example 3.10)

The image shows a musical score for two voices, labeled I and II, both in Bass clef. The tempo/mood is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The lyrics are: "Si in - i - qui - ta - tes ob - ser - va - ve - ris Do - mi - ne:". The melody for voice I is a series of eighth notes, starting on a G below middle C and moving stepwise up to a G above middle C. The melody for voice II is a series of eighth notes, starting on a G below middle C and moving stepwise up to a G above middle C, mirroring the melody of voice I.

Example 3.8 *De Profundis*, bars 21-24.

Tenor II *mf* Su - sti - nu - it a - ni - ma me - a in ver - bo e - jus:

Bass *mf* Su - sti - nu - it a - ni - ma me - a in ver - bo e - jus:

Example 3.9 *De Profundis*, bars 42-47.

Tenor *f* Qui - a a - pud Do - mi - num mi - se - ri - cor - di - a:

Bass *f* Qui - a a - pud Do - mi - num mi - se - ri - cor - di - a:

Example 3.10 *De Profundis*, bars 65-68.

Bass II *p* De pro - fun - dis cla - ma - vi ad te Do - mi - ne: Tamiam *pp*

Perc. ad lib.

Org. *pp* *SW.* *HW.* *Ped.* *pp*

Example 3.11 *De Profundis*, bars 1-7.

In the course of these four sections, the organ offers support to the chorus in many ways. In the first section, the pedal part basically doubles the melodic voice sung by the basses. The only difference is that repeated notes are tied in the pedal part and the regular minims of the vocal line become crotchets followed by crotchet rests. (example 3.11) In addition, the swell manual of the organ provides another melodic voice, which is somewhat independent of the melodic voice that is sung. This subsidiary melodic voice centers on B, a fifth above the tonal center E. This non-functional dominant, does not imply another tonal center; it merely acts as a reference point for a secondary melodic voice that is somewhat independent of the principal melodic voice. For example, the melodic voice in bass moves away from the tonal center E, while that of organ moves towards tonal center B (example 3.11). Pärt's application of this secondary melodic voice, which moves in parallel motion to the principal melodic voice, is his adaptation of the technique of medieval organum within tintinnabuli style.

Pärt shows his strong affinity for medieval music in other ways as well. He also wrote a hocket for the melodic voice in the pedals and the tintinnabuli voice in the lower, or great, manual. The latter part alternates lower and upper tintinnabuli notes in close position. This arrangement makes it sound as if there are two separate parts in separate registers that nonetheless share a single melody. *De Profundis* demonstrates Pärt's technique in manipulating the tintinnabuli method in vocal composition and his interest in looking backward to older repertoires as well as forward.

Hillier has pointed out that Pärt undoubtedly had the relationship between bells and Psalm 129 in mind when he decided to set the text to music. Pope Paul V made it a practice to accompany the recitation of Psalm 129 on All Saints' Days with bell ringing. The bells symbolized the awakening of believers for prayer on a this day dedicated to those who have died.⁷ The association with this particular psalm is clear and Pärt's selection of this particular psalm for a tintinnabuli setting is of great significance.

With regard to the pitch organization, Pärt picked E as the tonal center and the E-minor triad the basis for the tintinnabuli voice. It is reasonable to believe that Pärt was aware of the psalm tone on which this psalm was customarily performed. Originally, singers used the eighth psalm tone when chanting Psalm 129, but according to Jeffrey Kurtzman, it was the fourth psalm tone, rather than the eighth, that was most frequently used in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The fourth tone was deemed more appropriate given the sorrowful and suffering mood offered by this psalm.⁸ Like Pärt's setting of *De Profundis*, the fourth psalm tone is centered on E.

Antiphonal performance of psalmody has been the norm since the Christian era. Here, the bipartite verses of the psalms are subjected to antiphonal treatment, in which the first half of each verse is sung by one group and the second half by another. From Table 1 (p. 47), one can easily identify the alternating patterns of *De Profundis*.

⁷ Hillier. 20.

⁸ Jeffrey Kurtzman, ed. Introduction to *Vesper and Compline Music for Four Principle Voices*, vol. 14 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), xv.

In the score Pärt indicated that the percussion part was ad lib., and left it to the musicians' own judgment whether it should be included. Nevertheless, the omission of percussion would result in the loss of the resonant and elastic timbres of the percussion instruments. Unlike *Für Alina* and *Cantus*, *De Profundis* does not refer overtly to the timbre of bells. However, his suggestion of medieval musical textures and compositional procedures, Pärt creates a static background in which there is constant motion. In this way, *De Profundis* abstractly reflects the essence of a bell's distinctive timbre, which has been discussed earlier.

Conclusion

Pärt is self-critical, and he seeks perfection in his music. It is in this attitude that we find at least a possible explanation for his change of musical style. He turned abruptly from the use of received experimental techniques to a self-invented tintinnabuli style inspired by the sound of bells and the beauty of medieval and Renaissance music. The challenge he faced in the course of his compositional crisis was to make something new by reinterpreting old compositional procedures and relating them to the sound of bells.

The sincere spirituality of medieval music and the purity and transparency found in Renaissance music clearly inspired the composer. The mixing of features drawn from these periods with his idea of continuously moving sound against a static background provides the basis of tintinnabuli style. Pärt has admitted that he has a passion for the beauty of not only the sonorous timbre of bells, but also the meditative quality of silence. For him, the ultimate goal of the sound of a ringing bell is its slow dying away into silence. Pärt believes that only through music can he express his inner feelings, which are beyond the descriptive ability of words.

By examining selected works from Pärt's early tintinnabuli period, the association of bells with the music becomes clear. Pärt is able to include identifiable characteristics of bell sound in his music, not only via direct depiction, but also by means of a sublime recreation of it. The careful design and structure of Pärt's tintinnabuli music reflects not only his competence in invoking the timbre of bells, but also his desire to recreate the tranquility

embodied in bell sound. This distinctive musical style testifies to Pärt's searching for purity in music, and his pursuit of eternity as represented by silence. In doing so, he bestows new life on old ideas and various performing forces, not by means of unbridled freedom, but within carefully conceived boundaries.

Bibliography

Scores

Pärt, Arvo. *Arbos*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1981.

_____. *Berliner Messe*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1991.

_____. *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1982.

_____. *De Profundis*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1981.

_____. *Für Alina*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1980.

_____. *Partita Für Klavier Op. 2*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1997.

Secondary Sources

Apel, Willi. *Medieval Music*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1986.

Arter, David. *Parties and Democracy in the Post-Soviet Republics: The Case of Estonia*. Aldershot, England: Dartmouth, 1996.

Atlas, Alan W. *Renaissance Music in Western Europe, 1400-1600*. New York: Norton, 1998.

Bergquist, Peter, ed. Preface to *The Seven Penitential Psalms and Laudate Dominum De Caelis*. Madison: A-R Editions, 1990.

- Bergquist, William H. *Freedom! Narratives of Change in Hungary and Estonia*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.
- Blades, James, Charles Bodman Rae and Percival Price. "Bell" In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 3: 168-182. New York: Grove, 2001.
- Brotbeck, Roman and Roland Wächter. "Lernen, die Stille zu hören: Ein Gespräch mit dem estnischen Komponisten Arvo Pärt." *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 151, no. 3 (1990): 13-16.
- Conen, Hemann. Program notes to *Alina*. Compact Disc ECM CD1591, 1999.
- Ellis, Jane. *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness*. Houndmills, England: Macmillan Press, 1996.
- Elste, Martin. "Interview with Arvo Pärt" *Fanfare* 11, no. 4 (Mar./Apr. 1988): 337-341.
- Fedotov, Georgii Petrovich. *The Russian Religious Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946.
- Fisk, Josiah. "The New Simplicity: The Music of Gorecki, Tavener, and Pärt." *Hudson Review* 47, no. 3 (1994): 394-412.
- Hillier, Paul. *Arvo Pärt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- _____. "Arvo Pärt: Magister Ludi." *The Musical Times* 130, no. 1753 (1989): 134-137.

_____. "The Passion of Arvo Pärt." *BBC Music Magazine* Vol. 5, no. 6 (February 1997): 35-37.

Hoppin, Richard H. *Medieval Music*. New York: Norton, 1978.

Johnson, Timothy A. "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" *The Musical Quarterly* 78 (1994): 742-773.

Kimberley, Nick. "Starting from Scratch." *Gramophone* 17, no. 880 (1996): 14-15.

Krenek, Ernst. *Modal Counterpoint in the Style of the Sixteenth Century: Outline*. New York: Bossey and Hawkes, 1959.

Kurtzman, Jeffrey, ed. Introduction to *Vesper and Compline Music for Four Principle Voices*. Vol. 14. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998.

Mattner, Lothar. "Arvo Pärt: Tabula Rasa." *Melos* 47 (February 1985): 82-99.

McCarthy, Jamie. "An Interview with Arvo Pärt." *Contemporary Music Review*, 12, part 2 (1995): 55-64.

Niden, John and Patrick Salmon. *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*. London: Longman, 1991.

Olt, Harry. *Estonian Music*. Tallinn: Periodika, 1980.

Polin, Claire. "Interviews with Soviet Composers," *Tempo* 151 (December 1984): 10-16.

- Reese, Gustave. *Music in the Renaissance*. New York: Norton, 1959.
- Remeta, Daniel Robert, "Music Education in the U.S.S.R." D.M.A. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1974.
- Sandner, Wolfgang. Program notes to *Arvo Pärt: Tabula rasa*. Compact Disc ECM 1275, 1984.
- Smith Graham, ed. *The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994.
- Sparks, Edgar H. *Cantus Firmus in Mass and Motet, 1450-1520*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963.
- Schwarz, Boris. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972.
- Schwarz, Robert K. *Minimalists*. London: Phaidon Press, 1996.
- Swan, Claudia, ed. *Perceptible Processes: Minimalism and the Baroque*. New York: EOS Music, 1997.
- Ultan Lloyd. *Music Theory: Problems and Practices in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
- Williams, Edward V. *The Bells of Russia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Wright, Stephen K. "Stylistic Development in the Works of Arvo Pärt, 1958-1985." Master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1992.

Yudkin, Jeremy. *Music in Medieval Europe*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:
Prentice Hall, 1989.

CUHK Libraries



003871691