

3 Perspectives on Arvo Pärt after 1980

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Arvo Pärt is everywhere these days, a cosmopolitan persona of global renown, a genre-transcending artist at the center of multiple musical worlds, an icon of contemporary spirituality, and, since the early 1980s, a figure around whom narratives and meanings of contemporary European experience have coalesced.¹ Pärt is everywhere no less through his globe-trotting travel schedule to attend performances and recording sessions or to accept awards and recognition than through the dozens of performances of his work each month around the world. His perennial Grammy nominations, the ubiquity of his music in the soundtracks of mainstream and independent cinema, his established place in the canon of late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century musicology, and the evocative power of his name and sound in all kinds of musical and media milieux are what make the Pärt phenomenon.

To make this tangible, I will begin by elaborating on Pärt's presence in the soundscapes of twenty-first-century musical life. According to the International Arvo Pärt Centre website and Universal Edition, there were (based on licensing and part rental data) sixty-three official Pärt performances worldwide in March 2011, ranging from England to Estonia, Italy to Ukraine, New Zealand to Venezuela, and many places in between. Expectedly, there were handfuls of classic tintinnabuli pieces such as *Tabula rasa* that month, but there was also significant breadth to the music that was performed, including older, pre-tintinnabuli works such as *Nekrolog* and *Credo*, monumental large-scale works such as *Passio* and *Kanon Pokajanen*, and new music such as *Silhouette*. Beyond this impressive number of performances at major venues (and what were, most likely, scores of undocumented performances elsewhere), what is important to note is the non-essentialized Pärt sound here, in contrast to the tintinnabuli music of 1976–78 (*Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, *Für Alina*, *Fratres*, and *Spiegel im Spiegel*) that dominates other mediations of Pärt. Audiences want to hear lots of different music by Pärt, and musicians and presenters want to stay in touch with his contemporaneity, making it their own as well.

Outside of concert venues, Pärt's symbiotic relationship with the recording industry means that the breadth of his work is easily accessible to consumers. There is often a lag of only a few years between the

[29]

completion of a major work and its release on ECM Records or another major label: *Symphony No. 4* in 2010, *In principio* in 2009, or *Lamentate* and *Da pacem Domine* in 2005, all on ECM, for instance. Pärt's commercial success beyond the niche classical market creates vital revenue streams for boutique labels such as ECM and multinational conglomerates such as EMI and Sony, which helps explain the proliferation of 'portrait,' 'tribute,' and 'best of' albums that capitalize on Pärt's persona and a label's catalog. Other projects such as ECM's *Alina* release in 1999 (consisting of three different recordings of *Spiegel im Spiegel* and two extended performances of *Für Alina*), or the commemorative edition of the 1984 *Tabula rasa* recording ECM released in 2010, push this trend further by building on Pärt's penchant for new arrangements. This monumentalizes the intimate association of Pärt, the producer Manfred Eicher, and ECM, and attempts to make the familiar once again novel in an appeal to consumers new and old. As this feedback loop between Pärt's work and the recording industry makes clear, it makes sense to think and write about this side of Pärt in the language of popular music studies. Given Pärt's experience as a recording engineer and his involvement in the recording process, it can be fruitful to consider how Pärt might approach composing with an ear already towards the eventual mediation of his music via recordings.

Since the early 1990s, directors and music editors for film and television have ineluctably been drawn to the popular currency and evocative potential of Pärt's sound, so much so that some suggest that using Pärt's signature tintinnabuli works is clichéd, the sign of lazy direction and music editing.² Whatever the case, the marriage of Pärt and moving images in films such as *Lessons in Darkness* (Werner Herzog, 1992), *Wit* (Mike Nichols, 2001), *Heaven* (Tom Tykwer, 2002), and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004), among dozens of others (not including Pärt knock-offs in dozens of film scores), gets at something vital about Pärt as the 'soundtrack of an age' (to borrow the title of a 2010 conference on Pärt in London).³ The 'natural' invocation of Pärt in particular cinematic and televisual moments of spiritual intensity, nostalgia, tragedy, mortality, and remembering, to name a few, is how culture works and is continually made and remade. This shows how the self-reinforcing dynamics of representation, affect, convention, and marketing in sound and image engender the practices and texts that become culture. Pärt's sounds work at these moments because they resonate, and they resonate because they work.⁴

Observing how Pärt is regularly translated into social media echoes this resonance. There are countless examples of photomontages and short video pieces on social media platforms such as YouTube, Dailymotion, and Vimeo that use *Spiegel im Spiegel*, *Fratres*, *Für Alina*, and other early tintinnabuli as their soundtrack. The similarities among pieces such as *Ava* &

the Magic Kingdom (2009) by Vimeo user FotoNuova and *Snow Games: Quiet Winter Tobogganing* (2008) by Vimeo user Kurt_Halfyard in terms of style, content, ethos, and visual aesthetic are compelling.⁵ Here, *Spiegel im Spiegel* seems to iconically evoke or represent nostalgic adult imaginings and commemorations of middle-class American childhood pleasures – the surprise trip to Disneyland and backyard sledding on a snowy day. For FotoNuova and Kurt_Halfyard, the two different recordings of *Spiegel im Spiegel* they use bear a non-arbitrary relation, shaped by circulations of *Spiegel im Spiegel* in other media, to the ethos and affect of the visual content. Beyond questions of motivation and intention, the significant similarities in these pieces as they circulate publicly points to the iconic qualities of *Spiegel im Spiegel* and tintinnabuli style that are recognized in social media and cultivated in various markets.

Pärt's resonance reaches into music scenes beyond the world of Western classical music he inhabits. Björk, who thought about studying with Pärt and whose 1997 BBC interview with Pärt is revelatory, Keith Jarrett, who played on the 1984 ECM recording of *Fratres*, and Michael Stipe, whose quote "Arvo Pärt's music is a house on fire and an infinite calm..." has been used to endorse numerous Pärt recordings, all championed Pärt before it was fashionable to do so. As astute music journalists have begun to note, citing Pärt and his compositional techniques as influences are effective ways of establishing oneself in the milieu of post-rock, experimental hip-hop, post-minimalism, experimental, ambient and minimalist electronica, IDM (intelligent dance music), indie rock, and many others.⁶ Pärt is well known in these milieux, and, by citing his influence, artists can stake claim to some of his prestige. In addition to Björk, Pärt is commonly associated with the music of Aphex Twin, Radiohead, and Sigur Rós (who sometimes play *Für Alina* before concerts) on music blogs and websites such as SoundCloud.⁷ These associations reveal how Pärt is heard and valued across genres and within diverse soundscapes. This resonance is unsurprising to Pärt, as it corresponds to his understanding of musical truth: "I suppose we secretly love each other. Anonymously. That is a very beautiful thing."⁸

One finds similar things happening with Pärt in digital repurposings of his music, electroacoustic improvisation, and social media. In mixtapes and DJ mixsets, pieces such as *Da pacem Domine*, *Silouan's Song*, and *Nunc dimittis* are commonly used as an ambient outro at the end of 60 to 90 minutes of music. Artists such as Berlin-based DJ Hecq (Ben Lukas Boysen) or the Scottish collective of Joe Acheson and Hidden Orchestra use Pärt more integrally, however. In a 55-minute mixtape on the blog Headphone Commute, DJ Hecq moves from ambient vocal samples to the sounds of the Black Ox Orkestar, an experimental klezmer band from Montreal, and

on to the surreal sounds of Reykjavik-based experimental musician Ben Frost's remixed Carpathian fiddling.⁹ This transitions dramatically at 42:30 in the mixtape into Pärt's *Für Lennart in Memoriam*, which, after 4 minutes, bleeds extremely slowly into the next material.

In a 1:15 DJ mixset with live instrumentals on the Paris DJs website, Joe Acheson and Hidden Orchestra parade through their own work, post-rock, hip-hop, Pärt and Milhaud, Balkan brass bands, BBC radio dramas, and much more.¹⁰ The set opens with ambient vocal samples and the rhymes of New York City underground MC Afu Ra layered over Radiohead's "All I Need." Forty-six minutes into the set, excerpts from a BBC Radio 3 drama called *Between Two Worlds* and samples of woodland sounds are superimposed over a passage from Ode II of Pärt's *Triodion*, which then gives way to another Radiohead track called "Reckoner."

Pärt is sampled in other ways as well. "Little Weapon," a track from Lupe Fiasco's 2007 album *The Cool*, speaks in blunt, critical terms about child soldiers and the cultures of violence that children encounter in video games and domestic gun ownership. The bassline of "Little Weapon" is a sample of the opening seconds of Paul Hillier's 1996 Harmonia Mundi recording of Pärt's *De Profundis* with some rhythmic alteration, increased tempo, and digital processing that largely obscures the text. Throughout the track, even smaller parts and more subtle manipulations of this sample are a key part of the beat. Beyond the connection of this sample to the broader digital presence of Pärt (this same bit of *De Profundis* is accessible on numerous ringtone download websites, for instance), Fiasco's use of *De Profundis* as the foundational sample in this track is interesting for other reasons. On the one hand, the text of Psalm 130 might not be entirely out of place in "Little Weapon," since it could be read in the common tradition of Abrahamic faiths as a counterpoint to the unrighteous violence in Fiasco's rhyme. On the other hand, *De Profundis* might fit into the hip-hop aesthetic and ethic of authenticity that privileges the unique, esoteric sample over the sample that is overused, borrowed, or 'bitten,' in hip-hop parlance.

Finally, there are the hosts of rearrangements, reworkings, and improvisations of Pärt's music in live performance, studio recordings, and online that do not employ sampling. These are part of a process of making arrangements and reworkings of pieces that begins with Pärt himself; in the case of *Für Alina*, the process uses his music as a basis for improvisation, specifically on the ECM *Alina* album. The Universal Edition website lists no fewer than sixteen arrangements of *Fratres*, twelve of *Spiegel im Spiegel*, eight of *Da pacem Domine*, seven of *Summa*, and five of *Pari intervallo*. This predilection for arrangement and reworking can be traced to the Neoplatonic processes of instrumental tintinnabuli music, whose

mediation is decoupled from timbre, making timbre all the more important in this music. In contrast to sample-based engagements with Pärt, these rearrangements, reworkings, and improvisations stay closer to the integral form of his original work.

These kinds of rearrangements, reworkings, and improvisations include a 10-minute live recording of *Für Alina* by Seattle-based composer, multi-instrumentalist, and sound artist Rafael Anton Irisarri and Seattle-based pianist Kelly Wyse on SoundCloud.¹¹ Here, Wyse's extended performance of *Für Alina* is set against Irisarri's ambient samples, bowed electric guitar playing (à la Sigur Rós), and Phil Petrocelli's jazz ballad drumming, which Wyse subtly enfolds into the temporality of *Für Alina*.

In another example, the Austin-based instrumental post-rock band My Education has recorded an EP reworking of *Spiegel im Spiegel*, transposed down a fourth from Pärt's original, and lasting a little over six minutes. This rendering features slide guitar and a Hammondesque keyboard arpeggiation complemented by heavy bass, a slow rock beat, and ad lib guitar work. The additive melodic process of Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel*, which eventually spans a ninth on either side of the pitch center, is substantially attenuated here in favor of the new story that My Education tell through their incorporation of *Spiegel im Spiegel* into a post-rock instrumentation and temporality.

A final example is a minimalist bluegrass realization, on banjo and harmonica, of *Spiegel im Spiegel* on SoundCloud that is quite faithful to Pärt's original by Steve Wickham, a traditional and rock fiddler and multi-instrumentalist from Ireland.¹² Timbrally, his 'lonesome prairie' sound serves Pärt well, and vice versa. The social and cultural encoding of banjo and harmonica is transformed through this iconic tintinnabuli piece and, at the same time, hints of conventional bluegrass affective gestures evoke new genre-crossing resonances. Beyond the fantastic quality of Wickham's playing and the nuances possible in a solo performance of *Spiegel im Spiegel*, this track points to Pärt's place in cosmopolitan musical circulations and resonances – bluegrass and Irish traditional music, in this case.

Pärt is also established in mainstream twenty-first-century music histories such as those of Alex Ross and Richard Taruskin, as well as in other domains of music scholarship.¹³ Through his enthusiastic participation in academic conferences devoted to his work and the mission of the International Arvo Pärt Centre, Pärt is invested in scholarship on his music, which has significant disciplinary implications for historical, ethnographic, and theoretical approaches to his music.

So how did we arrive at this moment in twenty-first-century musical life? And how did Pärt arrive here?

Emigration and tintinnabuli

Pärt's presence in these soundscapes is deeply connected to the transitions and transformations effected by his emigration from Soviet Estonia on January 18, 1980. The years surrounding his emigration, however, are easily cast in simplistic, black-and-white terms that fail to fully capture the personal, artistic, cultural, and political dynamics of dislocation and relocation. From perspectives both within and beyond 'the West' (and it is precisely this term that still dominates the historical discourse on Pärt), the experiences of Pärt and his family and his creative work in the late 1970s and early 1980s are represented and mythologized through a number of ready-made narratives. These include the embattled Soviet dissident, 'the West' as the site of spiritual and individual freedom, and the Cold War exile establishing himself through a cosmopolitan, peripatetic artistic life. Amid the ruptures and traumas of Pärt's emigration, however, were continuities that enabled Pärt and his family to cope and, indeed, thrive in Vienna, Berlin, the Estonian diaspora, and many other milieux. The more publicly perceptible of these continuities were tintinnabuli style, relationships with musicians such as Neeme Järvi, Gidon Kremer, and Alfred Schnittke, and the practices and texts of the Pärts' Christian faith.

The story of Pärt's emigration and ongoing musical transformation begins with the personal and compositional crisis, and harassment and persecution he and his family lived through before, during, and after the 1968 *Credo* controversy.¹⁴ Beyond its political ramifications, *Credo* marked a critical artistic and existential moment in Pärt's life at a time when his physical and spiritual health were damaged. Pärt speaks to this in an often-cited excerpt from a 1968 interview with Ivalo Randalu on Estonian state radio:

It's like we've been given some number to work with (1, for example), an equation that's extremely complex when divided up into fractions. Solving the equation takes a long time and requires much effort, but all the wisdom is in reduction. Now, if it's conceivable that many of these fractions (eras, lives) are united by a single solution (S), then that 1 is something more than the solution to only one fraction. It has always been the right solution to all fractions (eras, lives). So the limits of any one fraction are too narrow for it and it goes through all times ... It means that the most "contemporary" (and always the most contemporary!) is the work in which there is a sense of a clearer, greater right solution (1). Art must deal with eternal questions, not just with taking care of the issues of the day.¹⁵

The decisive, original statement of faith with which *Credo* opens ("Credo in Jesum Christum") reflects how Pärt began to address artistic and

existential problems through what he understood to be the unity and eternal, universal truth of Christianity. By 1968, Pärt was already well along on the spiritual path towards converting to Orthodox Christianity, which happened in 1972 at the same time as he married his second wife Nora, also a convert. Deeply musical and articulate about Pärt's music, Nora Pärt has had a profound influence on his work and its reception since that time. There is much more in this interview quotation that bears on Pärt's music after his emigration as well – the importance of number, the value of purity and simplicity, a faith in human universals, and the notion that creativity addresses questions of the highest order.

Ideological, professional, and personal pressures continued to mount following the sensational debut of *Credo*, its subsequent silencing by Communist Party officials, and Pärt's increasing withdrawal and ostracization from official musical life in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR). Subsequent controversies over Pärt's provocations of the Soviet regime led to a ban on the sale and distribution of his work (although not its performance) in 1972, intensifying the material hardships of his family's life in the 1970s and Pärt's embattled place in the Estonian Union of Composers.¹⁶ Contrary to many popular references to and mythifications of Pärt's life in the early and mid-1970s, however, this was not a period of literal silence. Despite his increasing dissatisfaction with the materials and techniques of modernism, Pärt had written his Symphony No. 3 and a (later withdrawn) symphonic cantata called *Laul armastatule* (*Song to the Beloved*) by 1974.¹⁷ To support his family, he continued to write film music as well. If this was a period of silence, it was an intensely musical silence:

Before one says something, perhaps it is better to say nothing. My music has emerged only after I have been silent for quite some time, literally silent. For me, 'silent' means the 'nothing' from which God created the world. Ideally, a silent pause is something sacred... If someone approaches silence with love, then this might give birth to music. A composer must often wait a long time for his music. This kind of sublime anticipation is exactly the kind of pause that I value so greatly.¹⁸

The essential thing that occupied Pärt during the years between 1968 and 1976 was an intensive engagement with Gregorian chant (and medieval and renaissance polyphony) in order to understand for himself the secrets of monodic melody and its triadic implications:¹⁹

I needed a single melodic line that would carry with it the kind of spirit that was present in ancient songs and in traditional singing: absolute monody, the naked voice, which is the basis of everything. I wanted to learn how to guide that melodic line, but I had no idea how to do it.²⁰

To reach this understanding, Pärt devised a discipline for himself, filling thousands of pages of composition notebooks with melodic writing based on a sketch of a bird's wings, a photograph of a mountain landscape, or on the form and intonations of a psalm he had just read. This is what invests melody with the sense of objectivity that is so fundamental to Pärt's musical philosophy and what grounds the union of musical elements in tintinnabuli, which Pärt speaks of through the mystical arithmetic aphorism $1+1=1$.²¹ Although the exercises in Pärt's notebooks were not meant for any kind of performance, Andres Mustonen (the key figure in the Estonian early music scene since the early 1970s and a close collaborator with Pärt) and other members of his ensemble Hortus Musicus would occasionally read through Pärt's experiments to give him a sense of their live sound, especially as informed by period instruments and historically informed vocal techniques.

When Pärt's compositional impasse ended with an explosion of tintinnabuli works in 1976–77, it was Mustonen and his Hortus Musicus players who gave many of the first performances. Once tintinnabuli took form in pieces such as *Für Alina*, *In spe*, and *Fratres*, Pärt re-emerged as a major voice within the Soviet musical world and beyond. In a 1978 interview with Ivalo Randalu, Pärt described with characteristic simplicity what tintinnabuli was all about: "What are you trying to discover or find or achieve there [in tintinnabuli]? That fundamental tone and triad ... what are you looking for there?" Randalu asked. "Eternity and purity" was Pärt's reply.²² Later in the same interview, Nora Pärt reminisced about something Pärt once said: "I know a great secret, but I know it only through music and I can only express it through music. But how much I would like to possess it!"²³ It is essential to note that much of the iconic music that Pärt is most well known for in many different milieus was written in Estonia during these fecund years. This fact alone is enough to force the issue of continuity in terms of tintinnabuli and Pärt's emigration and to complicate facile Cold War distinctions between 'Communism' and 'the West.'

The originality and power recognized in Pärt's early tintinnabuli pieces was concretely related to the worsening professional and personal conditions that forced the family to make the difficult decision to emigrate. Beginning in 1978, there was a growing demand for Pärt's early tintinnabuli pieces at nonconformist performances and festivals in Estonia and outside the Soviet Union, including important performances of *Tabula rasa*, *Arbos*, *Fratres*, and *Missa syllabica* in Cologne, and *Cantus* in London. At the 1978 Festival of Early and Contemporary Music in Tallinn run by Mustonen, Pärt met Alfred Schlee, director of Universal Edition, the publisher that

was to play a vital role in his emigration and career. As was the case with composers such as Edison Denisov, Sofia Gubaidulina, Alfred Schnittke, Valentin Silvestrov, and Andrei Volkonsky, these contacts and successes outside the Soviet Union made life in Estonia increasingly difficult for Pärt and his family. While the ideological climate in Tallinn was more temperate in comparison with Moscow (which shaped the Communist Party's response to Pärt's earlier nonconformist work), the scale and cumulative effects of Pärt's success abroad and controversies at home forced the issue with Communist Party officials. With increasing frequency, Pärt was banned from traveling to performances abroad. This prompted him in 1979 to deliver a caustic speech to the Estonian Union of Composers about his suppression while mockingly wearing a long-haired wig.

These pressures escalated in 1979 until a member of the Communist Party Central Committee made the direct suggestion to Pärt that he emigrate, using Nora's official Jewish ethnicity as the purported reason. This would allow the Soviet regime to appear neutral with respect to Pärt, although the intensifying hardship his family would face if he did not emigrate was clear. He was soon asked to step down from the Estonian Union of Composers, effectively denying him the opportunity to participate in official musical life and earn a living. Owing to their experiences during previous travels in Western Europe, emigration was at least imaginable for Pärt and his family.²⁴ Given the unsustainable pressure from Communist Party officials, the decision was made to leave Estonia, officially bound for Israel (like all Jewish émigrés from the Soviet Union at that time) by way of Vienna. Leaving was frantic and difficult – a “trip into the unknown,” in Pärt's words.²⁵ At the Brest-Litovsk train station on the Soviet border, Pärt was able to cross with his scores and notebooks, despite the fact that they were notarized by the ESSR Ministry of Culture and were technically state property. This was on January 19, 1980, the day before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan escalated, the border was closed, and emigration was forbidden.²⁶

Upon their arrival in Vienna, a representative from Universal Edition, probably tipped off by Alfred Schnittke, located Pärt and his family and offered them assistance with obtaining Austrian citizenship in exchange for working with Universal Edition (a relationship that has lasted into the present). Later, Alfred Schlee made arrangements for Pärt to apply for a DAAD fellowship to Berlin, where the family settled. In Estonia, a complete ban on performances of Pärt and any public mention of him and his work went into effect in 1980. It was only to fully end with the transformations brought about by perestroika and the Singing Revolution (1987–1991) in the late 1980s.

Works, collaborators, and mediators in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s

After emigration, the story of tintinnabuli and Pärt's place in the soundscapes of twentieth- and twenty-first-century musical life is deeply entwined in his relationships with collaborators and mediators. While some of these relationships were forged in Estonia prior to his emigration, many more were the product of the expanded sonic and technological horizons and material stability he enjoyed in Berlin. They were also part of the self-reinforcing buzz that Pärt's tintinnabuli engendered at a particular Cold War, 'postmodern' cultural moment in the 1980s and 1990s. I focus here on Pärt's most established and enduring collaborators and mediators. Along with the specific contexts for Pärt's endless flow of commissions (*Te Deum* by Westdeutscher Rundfunk Radio or *Lamentate* by the Tate Modern gallery in London, to name just two) and the form and qualities of the texts he works with, these musicians and institutions profoundly shape the sonic and technical possibilities Pärt has at his disposal. These collaborators and mediators are central to Pärt's musical imagination.

Consider *Passio*, for instance. Pärt had a clear conception of this tintinnabuli masterpiece before emigrating, and brought sketches of *Passio* with him in 1980. After Pärt was settled in Berlin, Alfred Schlee arranged for a commission from Bavarian Broadcasting and Pärt quickly finished the monumental work, which was premiered in Munich in 1982. Something both sonic and spiritual was missing in this performance, however, and it wasn't until performances by the Hilliard Ensemble that Pärt's conception was fully realized. In conversation with Enzo Restagno, Nora Pärt recollects: "Arvo wasn't certain of the work's quality for many years, and his opinion changed only when he heard the Hilliard Ensemble's performance years later."²⁷ Pärt himself continues: "The Hilliard Ensemble brought their exemplary intonation [to *Passio*], and this work requires really perfect intonation. The same thing also happened with *De profundis*, *Cantate domino*, and *An den Wassern zu Babel*. Only after their performance was it clear to me that I had made the right decisions and that this music was justified in its existence."²⁸ And again Nora Pärt: "Everything was ideal – the intonation, phrasing, and everything was sung with the right expression. I remember what Arvo said after hearing them for the first time: 'There is nothing one can add to that. Everything is ideal.' We were almost moved to tears and so extremely happy that we had found the people who suited that music in every possible way."²⁹

Similarly, with *Miserere*, Pärt has stated concisely that "without the Hilliard Ensemble, there would be no *Miserere*."³⁰ Following on the landmark ECM recording of *Passio* in 1988 with the Hilliard Ensemble, the

sound and capacities of these musicians were an intimate, basic part of the conception of *Miserere*. Pärt's works, in other words, are fundamentally related to his collaborators and mediators; the imagination of specific voices and recording conditions are a constitutive part of many, if not most, of Pärt's works (Pärt is, after all, an expert sound engineer). The remarkable logogenic qualities of *Passio* and *Miserere* that seem to make tintinnabuli emerge organically from the intonations and structure of a text (thereby effacing Pärt's subjective role in the production of musical affect) are coupled to the grain of specific voices (the Hilliard Ensemble) and the sensibilities of specific collaborators (Paul Hillier).

The Hilliard Ensemble has an extensive ECM catalog apart from their Pärt recordings, placing them in the pioneering group of musicians brought together by ECM founder and producer Manfred Eicher. Pärt, Eicher, and ECM have had a productive, symbiotic relationship since the 1984 release of *Tabula rasa*, which was the inaugural project in the label's branching out from jazz through the ECM New Series. The 1984 *Tabula rasa* recording put Pärt on the map of twentieth-century musical life, establishing a sound, production style, and mode of visual representation that have become iconic of Pärt's persona and the ECM label.³¹ At present, there have been nineteen ECM releases featuring Pärt's music, totaling forty-four different works. Pärt, ECM, and Universal Edition have come to be identified with one another in many ways, not least through their echoing of minimalist design elements and images of Pärt as an ascetic mystic, all emblemized in the 2010 collaborative re-issue of *Tabula rasa*. The incredible success of this integration registers the extent to which Pärt's relationship with his mediators and collaborators is fundamental to his creative work. Pärt himself recognizes this in his relationship with Manfred Eicher:

My contact with ECM is beyond categorization: it is a natural supplement to my composing. Manfred Eicher's record producing is an art in itself. Of what kind? I don't know how to describe it. He is a performer, and his instrument is sound, acoustics, the sounding space which can be heard only by him. It is said that the talent of a sculptor lies not in the hands but in the eyes, in a special way of looking. Similarly, Manfred Eicher hears in a special way and his records are a result of this hearing. What I call a piece of art made by Manfred is actually a rich and sensitive complex of hearing, thinking, feeling, taste and artistic skill: a whole philosophy. It is also something very lively and in continuous formation. Our work together making new records is always a celebration, and has been for more than twenty years now. I count Manfred Eicher and his team among my co-authors, my blessings.³²

Here Pärt outlines the interpenetrating levels at which his collaboration and mediation work. Eicher's ear and musical sensibilities are attuned to Pärt's

music in ways that both reveal important aspects of a work apart from its mediation and, through the recording and production process, shape what a Pärt work is. Eicher's attunement to Pärt's music and the central place Pärt has assumed in the ECM catalogue have their own mythology as well. Listening to the radio while driving, Eicher had his 'road-to-Damascus' moment during a broadcast of the 1977 Westdeutsche Rundfunk recording of *Tabula rasa* with Gidon Kremer, Tatjana Grindenko, Alfred Schnittke, and Saulius Sondeckis.³³ Eicher stopped driving, listened to all of *Tabula rasa*, and immediately started working to find out more about Pärt and his music. That recording of *Tabula rasa* was the centerpiece of Pärt's 1984 debut with ECM. Eicher tells another anecdote about his attunement and the production of landmark Pärt recordings:

I remember an event with Arvo Pärt when we recorded the *Passio* in London and the wind was blowing very intensely around St Jude-on-the-Hill. We had to decide either to stop the recording because of the wind, or to use the wind. This was one of the best decisions we ever made, as the wind was blowing in the right key.³⁴

From Pärt's perspective, collaborating with Eicher and ECM means participating in a business model and artistic ethic that resonates with him. The ECM back catalog remains, by and large, in print and accessible, ensuring that Pärt's collaborations and mediations have a lasting presence. In terms of ECM's artistic ethic, Arvo and Nora Pärt cite the examples of the *Passio* project, which was recorded only after twenty to thirty performances with the Hilliard Ensemble, and the *Miserere* project, in which an entire two days were spent experimenting with microphone placement to record a particular passage.³⁵

The other Pärt collaborators intimately associated with ECM are Tõnu Kaljuste and the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (EPCC). Since their 1993 *Te Deum* recording, Kaljuste and the EPCC have joined the ranks of the Hilliard Ensemble as the iconic voices of Pärt, providing him with a fuller sonic palette to complement the transparent purity of the Hilliard Ensemble.³⁶ Like the Hilliard Ensemble/Hillier recording of *Passio*, the EPCC/Kaljuste recording of *Te Deum* was the first time Pärt heard a performance that fully realized his conception of the piece.³⁷ This collaboration has flourished through the 1990s and 2000s, installing Pärt, Kaljuste, and the EPCC in their position of global fame through the mediation of ECM (along with the celebrated collaborations of Hillier and the EPCC on the Harmonia Mundi label).

The collaboration is also, of course, about Estonia. The *Te Deum* project took shape in the early 1990s just as the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (EPCC), which Kaljuste founded in 1981, was establishing itself as

one of the premier choral ensembles in the world at a moment of national elation, material hardship, and tangible transition in Estonia. Through the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Estonia again became an independent state in 1991 and re-introduced its own currency in 1992, but Soviet troops remained in Estonia until 1994, social changes were traumatic for many, and the pigeonhole of the 'post-Soviet' with its fraught dynamics of retrospection dominated cultural discourse. It is not difficult to imagine the appeal of this collaboration for Pärt, Kaljuste, and the EPCC, first and foremost on artistic grounds, but also as a means of reconstituting Pärt's connection to Estonian musical life in substantive ways and establishing his Estonianness as his international renown continued to grow. Through this collaboration, the 'around-the-world trip' of Pärt's emigration was returning to Estonia in ways that echoed other 'post-Soviet' Estonian narratives of return and restoration.³⁸ *Tintinnabuli* was returning to its origins quite concretely through the EPCC/Kaljuste recordings made in the Niguliste Church in Tallinn and visually documented by Tõnu Tormis (a member of the EPCC and son of the composer Veljo Tormis, Pärt's one-time composition and theory teacher) on ECM albums such as *Litany*, *Kanon Pokajanen*, and *In principio*.³⁹

As the possibilities of uniting *tintinnabuli* to words and texts led Pärt to write in a choral idiom of considerable difficulty (and to think in terms of texts in his instrumental music – *Silouan's Song*, *Lamentate*, *Für Lennart in Memoriam*, and the Symphony No. 4, for instance), it is natural that he would find a choir with the technical and artistic ability to realize his music in Estonia. The EPCC emerges from the vital grassroots choral tradition in Estonia, emblemized by the UNESCO-recognized Estonian National Song Celebration (*üldlaulupidu*), which produces world-class musicians such as Kaljuste and members of the EPCC. Pärt's connection to the Estonian choral tradition, like his connection to conventional Estonian cultural narratives and identities, is not straightforward, however. In terms of style, difficulty, and expression, Pärt's *tintinnabuli* music does not integrate into the popular, mainstream Estonian choral repertoire, although pieces such as his *Magnificat* are staples for many Estonian choirs in international competitions. The Pärt/Kaljuste/EPCC collaboration, then, is grounded not in the conventional style and cultural significance of the national choral tradition, but in the highest level of professionalism that the EPCC has achieved, the choral sound and technique that Kaljuste and Hillier have molded, and the practicalities of working together in Estonia and for extended periods of time prior to a recording project.

Pärt's close relationship with Kaljuste and the EPCC is enshrined in one of his most important works, *Kanon Pokajanen*, which is dedicated to them. Like *Passio*, *Kanon Pokajanen* is thoroughly logogenic, as Pärt

explains: “I wanted the word to be able to find its own sound, to draw its own melodic line ... [T]he entire structure of the musical composition is subject to the text and its laws: one lets the language ‘create the music.’”⁴⁰ This ancient text composed by St Andrew of Crete in the eighth century is the prototype that Pärt renders in sound through tintinnabuli processes that are intimately attuned to the intonations of Church Slavonic, the structure of the verses, and the formal arrangement of the Odes⁴¹ (each consisting of an introductory *eirmos* based on a biblical canticle and four *troparia* verses expanding upon the theme of the *eirmos*, interspersed with short penitential litanies and doxologies) and other hymns that make up the Canon (*Sedalen*, *Theotokion*, *Kontakion*, *Ikos*, and the Prayer After the Canon). The generative force of prayerful language is plainly audible in *Kanon Pokajanen*: stressed syllables always fall on downbeats, the number of syllables in a word determines the melodic contour, and punctuation determines the values of notes and rests, for instance. These formulaic aspects of tintinnabuli are what Pärt describes elsewhere as the “objectivity” of logogenic melody.⁴² This is quite in keeping with theologies of language and sound in Orthodox Christianity, where semantic content is not distinguished from the aesthetics of recitation and melodic performance, and where truth and beauty are mutually constitutive. An analogy can be made here to the Orthodox theology of the icon with its significant Neoplatonic vein as well. The tintinnabuli process and formula derived from a sacred text are the prototype that Pärt renders in sound, attenuating or effacing his own subjectivity to make manifest the beauty and truth of the prototype, similar to the prayerful ascetic discipline of creating an icon according to a sacred prototype.

But *Kanon Pokajanen* is profoundly human as well, most notably in the nuances of texture, tintinnabuli processes, rhythmic hocketing, octave displacements, and voicing that accentuate the poetics of the hymns and the different prayerful registers at which they operate. Across the Odes, it is possible to hear where one is in the text based on the qualities of Pärt’s setting, which reveals in an embodied, affective way a host of symmetries and correspondences throughout the Canon. The subtlety and sophistication of Pärt’s engagement with the possibilities of tintinnabuli in *Kanon Pokajanen* is on a par with *Passio* (a work that has received much more analytical attention), although the qualities of Church Slavonic and a more liberal use of tintinnabuli procedures distinguish *Kanon Pokajanen* from *Passio*. When experiencing the “Prayer After the Canon,” one of the most beautiful moments in Pärt’s oeuvre, it is worth remembering that the rationality of tintinnabuli procedures is a means to an end. Nora Pärt puts it concisely: “I believe that Arvo’s music is meant more for the ears than for the intellect.”⁴³

Kanon Pokajanen did not come easily for Pärt – he worked at it for two years, incorporating earlier engagements with the same text (*Nun eile ich zu euch* and *Memento*) into the finished score. Given Pärt’s dedication of *Kanon Pokajanen* to Kaljuste and the EPCC, it is not a stretch to say that their collaboration is what enabled Pärt to conceive of the piece on the scale it assumed, requiring, in Pärt’s words, “90 minutes of perfect intonation,” and considerable musical and linguistic ability to perform a score with almost no expressive directions.⁴⁴ The collaboration of Pärt, Kaljuste, and the EPCC in the *Kanon Pokajanen* project and its mediation through ECM (it was recorded in Tallinn at the Niguliste Church prior to its premiere at the 750th anniversary of Cologne Cathedral in 1998) illustrate how Estonianness as a quality of sound and performance, relationships forged through shared language and experiences, and an acoustic place relate to the universality that Pärt seeks in his work.

Back in Estonia

Pärt could not return to Estonia until 1989, and then for a visit known only to family and close friends. His public return to the newly independent Estonia was in 1992 and marked the beginning of a long process of overcoming the estrangement and complexities of being a Soviet émigré, rehabilitating his music and status after Soviet malignment, and re-forging artistic and spiritual relationships in Estonia. The official ban on performances of Pärt’s music and public discussion of his work was perforce lifted with the political, social, and cultural changes of perestroika and the Singing Revolution in the late 1980s. In fact, one can interpret the re-emergence of Pärt in Estonian musical life as a tangible index of the dramatic changes in Estonia (and throughout the Soviet sphere of domination) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 1987, Mustonen and Hortus Musicus were performing the early tintinnabuli works on Estonian radio, and the Hilliard Ensemble performed Pärt at their Estonian debut in 1987.

In 1988, three important pieces on Pärt appeared in *Teater. Muusika. Kino*, a leading Estonian popular scholarly monthly.⁴⁵ Leo Normet’s “The Beginning is Silence” radically reoriented the discourse on Pärt away from Soviet aesthetic ideologies and his political entanglement. The tone and language in which Normet writes immediately indicate the transformations under way in 1988, placing Pärt’s work from the 1960s within the mainstream of European experimentalism without any reference to the controversies that culminated in the *Credo* scandal. Normet goes on to engage with Pärt’s early tintinnabuli work (including examples from *Missa*

syllabica and *De profundis* with religious texts) in sensitive, sympathetic, sophisticated ways that would have been unthinkable earlier in the 1980s and have aged well.

Merike Vaitmaa's "Tintinnabuli – eluhoiak, stiil ja tehnika" (Tintinnabuli – way of life, style, and technique) has aged just as well, both echoing and establishing the discourse on Pärt beyond Estonia. Here, Vaitmaa is able to place Pärt's early tintinnabuli work in the context of his collaboration with Mustonen and Hortus Musicus and his work after emigration, approaching tintinnabuli on its own terms and through its own values as an encompassing musical philosophy. In linking Pärt's re-emergence on the Estonian musical scene to the social and political transformations of the late 1980s, she plainly criticizes Pärt's silencing in Estonia after his emigration, particularly the recordings and films that were kept from the public. Finally, Vaitmaa's sense that Pärt's work from the 1970s can be linked to the minimalism of Steve Reich and Estonian composers Lepo Sumera and Erkki-Sven Tüür is emblematic of the different and, at times, contested ways tintinnabuli is situated as style and technique within broader soundscapes.

Ivalo Randalu's "Arvo Pärt novembris 1978" (Arvo Pärt in November 1978) is a transcript of an extensive interview with Arvo and Nora Pärt for a documentary film by Andres Sööt of the same name. *Arvo Pärt novembris 1978* and another Sööt film about Pärt called *Fantaasia C-duur (C-Major Fantasy)* had still not been shown on Estonian television in 1988, and Randalu's piece was an effort to bring the interview to light. The interview itself is invaluable for the impression it gives of Pärt at this fruitful, turbulent moment in his life, the extent to which he speaks about his creative process and worldview, and for the quintessentially Pärtian aphorisms he offers. On his hard-won turn from modernist experimentation towards tintinnabuli, for instance, he remarked: "When you feel like you're dirty, then you go to the sauna."⁴⁶

Estonian scholarship on Pärt and media coverage of his life and performances slowly mounted through the late 1980s and into the 1990s.⁴⁷ In 1989, the Estonian filmmaker Dorian Supin, Pärt's brother-in-law, made the first of several documentary films on the composer, called *Siis sai õhtu ja sai hommik (Then Came The Evening And Then The Morning)*, which aired on Estonian television. Supin has since made several more Pärt documentaries: *Cecilia* (2002), *Orient Occident* (2002), *Sinu nimi (Your Name, 2002)*, and *24 prelüüdi ühele fuugale (24 Preludes for a Fugue, 2002)*. Pärt's presence in Estonian musical life gradually intensified as well (the family took an apartment in Tallinn in the early 1990s), particularly through his flourishing relationship with Kaljuste and the EPCC. That said, Pärt did not fit conveniently into the cultural and political narratives of the 1990s

the way Veljo Tormis did, for instance. Pärt's music was not suited for mass amateur performance at Estonian song festivals, he did not write in Estonian, his religious texts were alien to many, scores and recordings of his music were prohibitively expensive, and he was perceived by some as more cosmopolitan than Estonian: successfully established in Berlin and not firmly rooted in Estonia. Over the course of the 1990s and into the 2000s, this has changed substantially through the reorientation of Estonian cultural discourse away from the 'post-Soviet' in ways that can more naturally accommodate Pärt and his music, and through the frequency and eventfulness of Pärt performances in Estonia, particularly with Kaljuste and the EPCC. For his seventieth birthday in 2005, Pärt was the featured composer at the Estonian Union of Composers annual festival, and his membership in the Estonian Union of Composers was renewed that same year, bringing his professional connection to Estonia full circle. Pärt was commissioned by Lennart Meri, President of Estonia from 1992 to 2001, to write *Für Lennart in Memoriam* for Meri's funeral, which took place in 2006.

Pärt at 75

In the 2000s, Pärt's work remained rooted in the choral tintinnabuli sound that is his trademark – *Nunc dimittis* and *Da pacem Domine* stand out in this regard. Thanks in part to the particulars of recent commissions, his work has also ventured back into traditional concert idioms with works such as Symphony No. 4, *Lamentate* (piano and orchestra), and *Adam's Lament* (choir and orchestra). Beyond revealing the new possibilities of tintinnabuli and his evolving relationship with his compositional process, Pärt's recent work reveals that tintinnabuli is not only about the sonic play of rationality and sensuality, but can also be framed to address urgent moral issues. In response to the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya and his deep concern for the human rights situation in Russia, Pärt stipulated that all performances of his works in 2006–07 be dedicated to her memory and asked that performers communicate his wishes to their audiences.⁴⁸ Similarly, Pärt dedicated his Symphony No. 4 to the courage and moral clarity of imprisoned anti-Kremlin businessman Mikhail Khordorkovsky, whom he took pains to mention while accepting the Composer of the Year prize at the 2011 Classic BRIT Awards. Given Pärt's experience of Soviet suppression, it is not hard to imagine why he feels compelled to explicitly address the situation in Russia in this way.

Adam's Lament, written to symbolically unite the European Cultural Capitals of Istanbul (2010) and Tallinn (2011), uses a poem by the Russian

St Silouan of Athos to emphasize the common heritage of Islam and Christianity in the person of Adam. Pärt comments:

For me, the name Adam is a collective term not merely for the whole of humanity, but for each individual, regardless of time, era, social class or religious affiliation. And this collective Adam has suffered and lamented on this earth for millennia. Our ancestor Adam foresaw the human tragedy that was to come and experienced it as his own guilty responsibility, the result of his sinful act. He suffered all the cataclysms of humanity into the depths of desperation, inconsolable in his agony.

Another rigorously logogenic work, *Adam's Lament* reflects Pärt's belief in the capacity of tintinnabuli to address the potent historical meanings of Turkey and Estonia representing European culture, and Adam as a figure who both unites and transcends Islam and Christianity through the recognition of suffering and violence. It also reflects how composition is at once an ethical and technical act for Pärt.

In 2010, Pärt turned 75 and was fêted around the world. In Estonia, Pärt's jubilee was marked by a month of performances that secured and celebrated his Estonianness. The programming of the month-long festival purposively recontextualized Pärt's pre-tintinnabuli, pre-emigration work in current Estonian musical life. Sharing space in venues across Estonia with a staged version of *In principio*, Estonian premieres of *Adam's Lament*, new arrangements of earlier works, and a complete performance of *Kanon Pokajanen* were the sounds of Pärt's work in Estonia during the 1960s and 1970s. These included the Symphonies Nos. 2 and 3, the cantata *Meie Aed (Our Garden)*, the *Collage über B-A-C-H*, a festival of films with his original scores, a concert pairing dances from Pärt's music for children's theater with works by his teacher Heino Eller, and a restaging of the 1977 premiere of *Tabula rasa* with Kremer and Grindenko. The unambiguous purpose of this programming, and its naturalness in an Estonian context, was to reorient the commonplace, cosmopolitan association of Pärt and tintinnabuli relative to his work in Estonia, for Estonian media, and in the Estonian language, thereby renewing his connection to the history, identity, and soundscape of the nation.

For Pärt's birthday on September 11, the celebrations were centered in Rakvere, the town where Pärt spent most of his childhood. For that day, Pärt created *Kyrie* for the five new bells of the Lutheran Church of the Trinity in Rakvere. Beyond the self-evident connection to tintinnabuli, this piece, written at the request of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Rakvere municipality, made tangible a deep connection between Pärt

and place; it emplaced Pärt anew in Rakvere by incorporating his work into the public and religious soundscape of the town. With typical Pärtian good humor, *Kyrie*, which now chimes each day at noon in Rakvere, ends with a fleeting reference to the Estonian children's song "Juba linnukesed" ("Outside, the Birds Are Already Singing"), recalling both Pärt's childhood and the constant promise of spring.

Directly after the performance of *Kyrie*, there was another emphatic placing of Pärt in Rakvere and in an Estonian national consciousness. Taking as a point of departure the well-known story, related in Supin's documentary *24 Preludes for a Fugue*, of the young Pärt circling a loudspeaker for hours in the Rakvere market square on a bicycle, listening to symphony broadcasts and dreaming of becoming a composer somehow different from those he was hearing, the Estonian artist Aivar Simson created *Noormees jalgrattal muusikat kuulamas* (*Boy on a Bicycle Listening to Music*), a sculpture now part of an installation in Rakvere. The video production of the opening performance in Rakvere on September 11 ends with the voice of Pärt relating the story of himself as that boy on a bicycle listening to music.⁴⁹ What is particularly noteworthy about this production is its natural emphasis on Pärt's music for children, since he is himself a child in the sculpture. Drawn from Soviet Estonian animated films including *Väike motoroller* (*The Little Motor Scooter*), *Ukuaru*, and one of the "Operaator Kõps" ("Cameraman Kõps") animated films, these are some of Pärt's most unproblematically Estonian sounds – they are local, vernacular, and popular in a way tintinnabuli is not, and are, therefore, most apt for recontextualizing Pärt's Estonianness.

In the future, the International Arvo Pärt Centre outside Tallinn in Laulasmaa will be a museum, a place for research and performance, and will make many of Pärt's materials digitally accessible – a prescient initiative by Pärt and his family to help the story of his music continue to be told. A small example of things to come: as part of Pärt's public engagement through the center, he worked in June 2011 with a group of schoolchildren to put on a concert of eighteen of his works at the Swedish Church of St Michael in Tallinn. The music ranged from early works such as *Diagrams* for solo piano and children's songs such as "Mina olen juba suur" ("I Am Already Big") to *Da pacem Domine* arranged for recorders, *Veni Creator* for boys' choir, and *Peace Be Upon You, Jerusalem* for girls' choir. In a gesture that typifies Pärt's enthusiastic outreach, he joined a boy soprano at the piano for his *Vater Unser*, a short non-tintinnabuli piece given to Pope Benedict for the sixtieth anniversary of his ordination in July 2011.

Further reading

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