

Arvo Pärt: Soundtrack of an Age

Schedule

Friday 24 September

9.30am coffee

10am Paper 1

At the End of Time: Flexibility of Temporal Experience in Pärt's *Lamentate*

Olivia Lucas (Harvard University)

Arvo Pärt said of *Lamentate*, that he “wrote a lament, not for the dead, but for us, the living...who have the difficulty of dealing with the suffering and despair of the world.” Indeed, the piece develops a rich narrative, following the turns of human emotion in the contemplation of death and salvation. Pärt's explicit use of a Troparion in shaping the melodies of the piece provides us with a glimpse into his own perspectives on human temporality and the emotional realities of conscious existence.

Pärt's molding of the hymn's text results in multiple emotional and temporal realms that are able to coexist and interact. These realms are musically distinct, as their approaches to sound (and silence) tell us that we are in a new place. The different sonic spaces also have individual temporal characteristics; one seems to be over quickly, while another, though ostensibly shorter in duration, seems to extend endlessly. Then, in memory, these temporal qualities take on new dimensions, as durations that once were long are contracted, or vice versa.

Thus, the music's prayer is not solely focused on an individual's spiritual journey, but also invites the listener to consider carefully the simultaneous flexibility and fragility of thought, feeling and memory. We remember things differently than we first felt them, both temporally and emotionally, and our very limitation to the realm of time becomes a great potential for densely interwoven experiences and memories. *Lamentate* offers us a window into understanding the lived experience of our own temporality.

10.40am Paper 2

Between music and sculpture – Is Arvo Pärt's *Lamentate* a homage?

Debbie Moss (Roehampton University)

In its broadest sense, a homage is a formal expression of respect from one person to another. Within the same genre it also has a very specific meaning, as a recognisable stylistic quotation from one creative work to another. In this context, Pärt has composed a homage to Mozart in his Mozart-Adagio (1992) a piece for violin, cello and piano. In this work, he quotes directly from the original Adagio of the Sonata in

F major K. 280 and combines elements of the original work with his own Tintinnabuli style. More recently, Pärt has dedicated *Lamentate* (2002), a composition for piano and orchestra, as 'a homage to Anish Kapoor and his sculpture *Marsyas*'. The question arises as to what it means when the homage refers to a different art form. Such inter-art transfer is necessarily problematic and requires interrogation. By making *Lamentate* a homage to *Marsyas*, how can Pärt realise his intention? How can a musical composition quote from a visual art work? In this paper, I aim to explore the relationship between the music and the sculpture, in the context of homage and inter-art transfer by addressing the difficulties inherent in such a concept: how has Pärt mediated and expressed his experience of the art work with his use of Tintinnabulation, word-setting, silence and sonic space in his musical work? I will attempt to establish connections between these two works of different genres and illuminate the inter-textual 'space' as the locus of potential transmedialisation.

11.20am Paper 3

Music, Transcendence, and the Poetics of Repentance: Pärt's *Kanon pokajanen*

Gene Biringer (Conservatory of Music, Lawrence University)

Uncritical references to Arvo Pärt's "transcendent" music generally gloss over an obvious but crucial distinction: that transcendence is not a property of the music but the potential experience of an engaged participant *in response to it*. In Rilke's poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo," for example, the close contemplation of a work of art elicits an internal command that is at once inspiring and unsettling: "You must change your life." And while it follows that virtually any object, artifact, or idea closely contemplated might yield a similar experience in one who is sufficiently sensitive, the question remains whether certain works of art are better catalysts than others, and if so, why. According to rhetorician George Steiner, the "voice of intelligible form" in Rilke's torso of Apollo ought to emanate from *any* work of art "worth meeting." Indeed, Steiner writes, "the indiscretion of serious art . . . queries the last privacies of our existence." [*Real Presences*, 142] This paper asks what it might mean for a composition like *Kanon pokajanen*, arguably Pärt's most important choral work of the 1990s, to "interrogate" the listener in this way and through such an encounter "purpose change [by the] seeking out of being."

One of Pärt's longest and most austere compositions, the *Kanon pokajanen* sets the Orthodox canon of repentance, a set of nine Odes written by St. Andrew of Crete (eighth century). Pärt's setting of the text, a translation in Church Slavonic of the original Greek, relies on a small set of musical formulae for the corresponding parts of each Ode, which, given the length of the canon, lends the composition a formal severity even more extreme than that of other tintinnabuli works. Such severity is of course an appropriate response to the text, which laments the frailties that separate human from divine, but I suggest, in addition, that the subtle changes Pärt introduces from one Ode to the next simultaneously reveal a process of renunciation and repentance that seems at once the province of both artist and audience. Such "indiscretions" have the potential to bring the listener into a lived experience of immanence or, as Steiner puts it, into a "real presence" of being.

12 noon – 1.20pm Lunch

1.20pm Paper 4

The complex austere simplicity of the *Tintinnabuli* style by Arvo Pärt

Saale Kareda (Cultural attaché - Estonian Embassy, Vienna)

The tintinnabuli music by Arvo Pärt is one of the greatest enigmas of contemporary music. From which sources does this musical language, which is based on simple elements, but also contains highly complex structures, derive its magical power?

Pärt composes sacral music, mostly in accordance with sacred texts, but one should not over-evaluate this aspect, since his music does not only appeal to religious people. It is the demand for clarity, concentration and substantiality, the yearning and searching for the core of existence, which is not bound to any religious confession or ideology and which bewitches the audience.

In his tintinnabuli laboratory, Pärt examines the ancient tonal elementary cells and out of these, he creates fascinating new organisms. The internal structure of these works may not only be of interest for musicologists. Pärt has managed to break through to the ancient geometry, which is austere and simple, but also highly complicated at the same time.

2pm Paper 5

Time and timelessness in Pärt's *Tintinnabuli* Style

Leo Brauneiss (University of Vienna)

"That is my goal. Time and timelessness are connected. This instant and eternity are struggling within us." (Arvo Pärt)

Time is not only a primary category of music spreading necessarily in time when sounding, but also a fundamental experience of mankind, a "condition humaine", thus bringing together aesthetic experiences and fundamental philosophical and theological questions. Interpreting Pärt's words one might say his music struggles for overcoming time by implanting aspects of timelessness in the course of the time music never can fully get rid of. For demonstrating this in detail I suggest to differentiate between micro-time – the way in which a piece of music follows the flow of time or not – and macro-time – the manner a composition tries to reveal or to overcome the presence and timeliness in the stream of history.

Concerning the micro-time the usually expanding dynamic M-voice represents a linear form of time leading to somewhere, whereas the circulating triadic T voice, without any specific melodic developments when separated from the M voice, represents a rotating form of time. The struggle of time and timelessness is thus embedded in the principal structural relationship of the Tintinnabuli Style. The melodic voice however can contribute itself to the overcoming of time either by

constant rearranging of the notes according to simple principles of rotation, which finally lead back to the beginning and thus closing a circle (this is the case for instance in *Summa* or in the *Credo* of the *Berlin Mass*) or by constant mirroring which contributes to transform temporal processes into perceptions of space (like for instance in *Summa* or *Spiegel im Spiegel* with its double mirroring). Important is furthermore what has been described as mensural canon and might be called fraction of time: melodic patterns are presented simultaneously in different tempi thus relativizing not only time by breaking up its unity but also the feeling of movement (the expression mark of the second part or *Tabula rasa*, the prototype of this kind of mensural canon, with constant moving of all voices is: *Senza moto* = without movement).

Time however comes to an end in two different ways: in ever lasting eternity and in the singular moment, the One in categories of time. Pärt's method of evolving a composition out of few musical nuclei means that each moment contains the information of the whole work from the very beginning to the last note: Pärt's compositions are therefore not stories with an uncertain ending but an unfolding of a precious moment we are constantly in danger of losing in everyday life.

Concerning the macro-time there is no doubt that Pärt's aim is to overcome transient actuality. His restriction to the pre-existing simple tonal materials of triad and scale corresponds with his belief in eternal truths which need not to be invented once more but have to be found and reinterpreted again and again by each generation and every individual. This needs time and takes place in time and in works of art: The struggle for timelessness does not only cause grief but is an origin of art in general and Pärt's *Tintinnabuli* music in particular.

2.40pm Paper 6

Pärt's Evolving *Tintinnabuli* Style

Michael Chikinda (Queen's University, Canada)

When studying the oeuvre of a composer, one of the most challenging and rewarding tasks is to distinguish any definitive shifts in the writing style. In some instances, the shift is both clear cut and dramatic, such as Igor Stravinsky's adoption of the twelve-tone method after the death of Arnold Schoenberg. Arvo Pärt's compositional style experienced a similar rupture after the completion of *Credo* in 1968 when, contrary to Stravinsky, he abandoned the twelve-tone method in order to find a means of expression in keeping with his spiritual beliefs. In other instances, the shift is more subtle, and the nuances seem to elude perception. Such is the case in Pärt's modification of the *tintinnabuli* style in the early 1990's. Specifically, I will examine *And One of the Pharisees* (1992) and *The Beatitudes* (1990/91).

I argue that the roles of the M and T voices have become conflated, which problematises the theological grounding of these two parts: the former representing a subjective, "I" orientation associated with sin and the later representing an objective "non-I" world of forgiveness. As a result a process that was formerly

transparent becomes more complicated reflecting the conflicted nature of the earth-bound man trying to come to terms with the mysteries of redemption. There is a shared concern amongst the Minimalist composers for choosing a process that allows for clarity of perception. Christos Hatzis comments: "The medium (the composition) is the incidental result of, and the desire for, the act of communication. It is the act itself and the level at which it happens that is of primary value." It is the "level" that has changed in the evolution of Pärt's compositional vocabulary, and we are rewarded with a richer texture that challenges us both theoretically and theologically.

3.15pm coffee

3.30 – 5pm The Hilliard Ensemble and Friends – Arvo Pärt in Context

Saturday 25 September

9am coffee

9.30am Paper 7

Arvo Pärt's *Credo*: Soundtrack of the sixties and compositional crisis

Andrew Shenton (Boston University)

Credo (1968) is a pivotal piece in Pärt's compositional development. Scored for piano, chorus and large orchestra the work is not a liturgical credo, but it is the first setting of a religious text by Pärt. Much has been made of the political controversy surrounding the work and the subsequent period of reflection in which Pärt engaged, but little has been done to analyse or contextualise the piece. In this essay I first explore the compendium of compositional techniques Pärt utilizes, noting especially personal appropriation of standard methods such as tone rows, extended vocal techniques and partly improvised sections. I evaluate the piece as an epitome of late sixties style and analyse it on its own merits. Second, I review the piece for signs of the compositional crisis that precipitated the subsequent period of reflection which Pärt undertook. Musicologists such as Paul Hillier and Peter Schmelz have argued that Pärt discovered his new style during the compositional silence after *Credo*. I argue that with *Credo* the search for a new style had already begun and look for intimations of what we now have come to appreciate as tintinnabuli style.

10.10am Paper 8

Where to start? And when to stop? *Tintinnabuli* solutions to the problem of closure in minimalist music.

Andrew Kohn (West Virginia University)

Arvo Pärt's *tintinnabuli* music has often been called minimalist, even holy minimalism. These labels have met with resistance. However, a comparison of Pärt's music with the original defining features of minimalism, as discussed by Jonathan Bernard, shows the aptness this label, despite its many unfortunate ancillary connotations. The independent arriving at a similar style by Pärt and others (such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass) is therefore an instance of "multiples," a phenomenon also seen, for example, in the independent deriving of serialism by Hauer, Schoenberg, and Lutyens.

Bernard points out a central problem of minimalist art: determining the formal boundaries of a process. This problem can be demonstrated through early minimalist compositions by Reich and Glass. The *tintinnabuli* compositions of Arvo Pärt demonstrate a number of solutions to this problem. Solutions derived from the structure of a text are already well documented. Others are more purely musical, based on the concept of cyclic completion, the general features of Western Art Music (especially the centrality of the pitch A440), and the characteristic ranges of musical instruments. This is seen, for example, in *Arbos*, *Fratres*, and *Spiegel im Spiegel*. This music values unity, centrality and circularity, combined with contingency. This connects with the theological topics of the nature of God and hesychastic prayer.

10.10am Paper 8

10.40am morning tea

11.10am – 12 .40pm Pärt on Film (Papers 9-11)

Violent Ecologies: Arvo Pärt and Documentary Film

Laura Dolp (Montclair State University, New York)

Increasingly Pärt's music has been used to circumscribe and reflect on different forms of violence. In its many partnerships with the moving image - more particularly in recent documentary film - Pärt's music has been situated in counterpoint to the devastation wrought by the attack on the World Trade Towers in New York (*Fahrenheit 9/11*; Michael Moore, 2004), the destruction of the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan, Afganistan (*The Giant Buddhas*; Christian Frei, 2005) and the realities of environmental degradation in the American South in Laura Dunn's *The Unforeseen* (2007). Moore's controversial commentary on the terrorist attack pairs *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* with graphic footage of the event. Frei's *Giant Buddhas* uses *Für Alina* in its investigation of the complex religious and cultural tensions surrounding the statues, more specifically as the modern-day pilgrim Nelofer Pazira visits the site after their destruction. Dunn's *Unforeseen* relies heavily on several of Pärt's works to contextualize both the tangible harm of economic development and the unforeseen aspects of its resolution, which the director claims are the reflected in its central character, the fragile aquifer of Barton Springs in Austin, Texas. This paper examines qualities of explicit and implicit threat in the environments of these films. It explores the utility of Pärt's music in their storytelling and poses larger questions about its relationship to what the poet Wendell Berry has described as "the

deserted prospect of modern mind." Pärt's music has been positioned on numerous occasions as a kind of antidote to this modality. I propose that while his music is often utilized for the power of its formal simplicity, it often serves as a canvas for pluralist values and debate, and thus is uniquely suited to claims of the documentary genre. When the focus of this debate is an expression of force, Pärt's music serves as both a critical and affective tool in its suggestion of a larger, messier and universal struggle.

Arvo Pärt and the Cultures of Repurposing and Remediation

Jeffers Engelhardt (Amherst College)

In thinking through the ways Pärt's tintinnabuli music functions as the soundtrack of an age, it is imperative not only to embrace but to move beyond the regnant discourses of biography, modernism and postmodernism, spirituality and Orthodox Christian theology, Soviet and post-Soviet aesthetics, and the politics of representation. There is a critically important story to be told in the agentive ways musicians and other artists, listeners, and other cultural producers and consumers engage with the sound of Pärt's tintinnabuli music through the work of repurposing and remediation. In this paper, I examine a number of forms of repurposing and remediation, including user-generated content on social media platforms (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion), discussion on social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook), and sample-based hip-hop production (e.g. Lupe Fiasco), in order to show how much scholarly and popular discourse on Pärt is echoed and amplified in these creative practices. I am particularly interested in two aspects of these repurposings and remediations: 1) the ways this kind of creative labor reorients conventional text-based understandings of works like *Spiegel im Spiegel* or *De Profundis* and 2) the ways Estonianness is represented and performed in relation to Pärt. Ultimately, this paper suggests how Pärt's tintinnabuli work is implicated in global technocultures and forms of cultural production that effectively transform established assumptions about the significance and novelty of this music through individual creative labor and the possibilities and constraints of digital media.

The Appropriation of Arvo Pärt's Music for Cinema and Television

Michael Baumgarten (Boston)

In this paper I propose to discuss one specific aspect of Jeffers' concept of "repurposing and remediations," the impact of Pärt's *tintinnabuli* music on the recent output in cinema and television. In the last twenty years, Pärt's music has been incorporated into over seventy fiction, documentary, full length, and short films, as well as television programs, which were produced in such diverse countries as Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and United States. The gamut of topics ranges from such sinister themes as World War I, Holocaust, terminal illness, terrorism, human beings in extreme situations, and 9/11, to tenderness, love, compassion and forgiveness. It is remarkable that in many of these films the directors and producers have only considered a handful of Pärt's works, i.e. *Für Alina*, *Spiegel im Spiegel*, *Cantus in*

Memory of Benjamin Britten, Fratres, and Litany. The question emerges why specifically these compositions prove to be suitable for use in a cinematic context. A closer look at the insertion of *Spiegel im Spiegel* into a few selected films discloses that the same music can be apposite in supporting fundamentally different narratives, set in a plethora of diverse cultural environments. In each of these films Pärt's composition generates a new, entirely singular meaning, due to the coupling of *Spiegel im Spiegel* with different images, dialogues and ambient sounds. *Spiegel im Spiegel* acts, therefore, as the proto-soundtrack for the twenty-first century. The universality, which Pärt's music offers, is closely linked to the specific orchestration of piano and strings. Since the earliest dawn of silent cinema, both have been established as the prototypical film music instruments. In addition, Pärt's *tintinnabuli* music attracts directors because of the non-offensive tonal or pseudo-modal language, the sparse texture in case of *Für Alina*, providing ample space for the images and other sounds to "pass" literally through, and the ostinato-like pattern and repetitive rhythmic motion in case of *Spiegel im Spiegel*, supplying the cinematic experience with a constant, forward-urging movement. These rather neutral, effortless characteristics of the music are predominantly relevant for underscoring extraordinary instances in the narrative, in order to highlight events of most intense emotions and sublime significance.

12.40-2pm Lunch

2pm Performance of String Quartet Music (Tyburn Quartet: Katie Littlemore, Charlotte Skinner, Sophie Broadbent, Zoe Marshall) tyburnquartet.co.uk

Summa, Psalom, Fratres

Spiegel im Spiegel (Katie Littlemore, Robert Sholl)

2.40pm Paper 12

Music and suffering: *Spiegel im Spiegel* as humanizing agent in *Wit* (2001).

Benjamin Skipp (Oxford University)

This paper will examine the use of Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* within the television-play *Wit* (dir. Mike Nichols, 2001) whose narrative follows the treatment and death of a John Donne specialist from ovarian cancer. This, one of Pärt's best-known works, is a distinct and critical presence within the film, and contributes to the presentation of its central themes. Primarily, this paper will outline how the musical character of the work aids the conveyance of sensibilities relating to the film's subject. In particular, I shall examine how *Spiegel im Spiegel* relates to notions of nostalgia and childhood that permeate the film. The second part of the paper will begin to consider the broader, ethical resonance of the decision to use this particular work in the adaptation of *Wit* as it was transformed from a play to a film. *Spiegel im Spiegel* has become paradigmatic of Pärt's ability to write beautiful, affirming music which, partly for these reasons, has become highly profitable. I will examine the issues that arise from

the use of his music within a film whose subject actively resists false beautification, and question whether the veracity for which the film strives is potentially undermined by the emotive content of *Spiegel im Spiegel*. I shall conclude by suggesting that *Wit* has contributed to the formation of a particular genre of documentary-style film whose principle aim has been to humanize the act of physical suffering without falling into sentimentalism or kitsch. The incorporation of Pärt's music represents a significant role within that project.

3.20pm paper 13

Pärt's Soundtrack of an Age: Diagnosis, Post-Mortem and Obituary of Modernity

Robert Sholl (Royal Academy of Music, London)

When Michael Moore used Pärt's *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten* (1977) in his film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, he made an indelible aesthetic link between the status of humanity and the status of modernity. If modern humanity spiritual and emotional status is indeed situated between Good Friday and Easter, as George Steiner has posited, Moore presents a simulacrum of this vacuum. This paper examines the status of being caught, and exposed, as Slavoj Žižek has put it, to the Real as the ultimate and defining experience of the twentieth century. Much modernist art has been concerned with the utopian, anthropological and archaeological search for new levels of humanist and spiritualist reality and revelation in extremes of violence, joy and ecstasy. This search excavates a spirituality that can be understood as the moment when intuition of the incommensurate and immeasurable is confronted by and released from the known and perceptible. This paper examines the way in which Pärt's music articulates this dialogue as mouthpiece and soundtrack of an age.