

Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts

Statistically the most performed and listened to contemporary composer in the world, Arvo Pärt is a musical and cultural phenomenon. This book is an essential resource for anyone interested in his extraordinarily innovative and uniquely appealing music. Andrew Shenton surveys the full scope of Pärt's oeuvre, providing context and chronological continuity while concentrating in particular on his text-based music, as well as analyzing and describing individual pieces and techniques, including tintinnabulation. The book also explores the spiritual and theological contexts of Pärt's creativity and the challenges of performing his work. This volume is the definitive guide for readers looking to engage with the form, content, and context of Pärt's compositions, as Shenton situates Pärt in the narrative of metamodernism and suggests new ways of understanding this unique and beautiful music.

ANDREW SHENTON is a scholar, prize-winning author, performer, educator, consultant, and administrator based in Boston, MA. He holds bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from London University, Yale, and Harvard, respectively. He is the author of a monograph on Messiaen and editor or co-editor of three collections of essays. A leading expert on the music of Arvo Pärt, Shenton edited and contributed to *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and is a contributor to *Arvo Pärt's White Light: Media, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). He is on the faculty of Boston University and is active as an organist and conductor. He has premiered more than ninety pieces and has more than thirty recordings to his credit.

Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts

Choral and Organ Music 1956–2015

ANDREW SHENTON



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For
Steven G. Farris

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Preface

Around Pärt's seventy-fifth birthday in 2010 a series of connected conferences in Boston, London, and Canterbury brought together scholars in conversation about the composer and his music. Some of these papers were reworked into a collection of essays entitled *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, which aimed to address prevailing themes in Pärt scholarship and to bring new themes into the conversation.¹ A second collection of essays (edited by Laura Dolp) greatly expands the breadth and depth of inquiry, breaking new ground on tropes about Pärt and his music.² This current text is part of these contributions to Pärt scholarship published by Cambridge University Press. It came about because, although Pärt is widely written about in the press, there are surprisingly few book-length treatments of his life and work. The first monograph in English devoted exclusively to Pärt's music contains much useful information but is now outdated because it does not refer to any works composed after 1996.³ The only other recently published books are a collection of the texts used by Pärt (compiled and published by the Pärt Centre in Estonia) and an extended essay by Peter Bouteneff published under the auspices of The Arvo Pärt Project, an enterprise sponsored by St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York, which has begun to tackle issues associated with the Orthodox Christian tradition that has guided Pärt's work since the early 1970s.⁴

It is extraordinary that the only other information and critical engagement with Pärt's music comes from short articles and book chapters, some unofficial websites, a few unpublished theses and dissertations, and a few larger texts not in English.⁵ Some influential articles in the 1970s and 1980s helped to establish Pärt's reputation, describing the tintinnabuli technique and naming many of the choral or organ works, but these are also now out

¹ Shenton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*. ² Dolp (ed.), *White Light*.

³ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*. My text therefore includes more than half of Pärt's output, which was not available to Hillier for his text.

⁴ Rosma et al. (eds.), *In Principio*, and Bouteneff, *Out of Silence*.

⁵ See, for example, www.arvopart.org. Examples of the larger texts include Kautny, *Arvo Pärt zwischen Ost und West*; Restagno, *Arvo Pärt allo specchio*; and Restagno et al., *Arvo Pärt im Gespräch*, translated by Robert Crow as *Arvo Pärt in Conversation*.

of date.⁶ Some recent theses and dissertations have covered aspects of style, analysis, and basic performance practice in selected works.⁷ In this text I therefore refer to scholarship on significant compositions to provide wider dissemination of some of the good work that is being done, and I include an extensive bibliography. Eventually the Pärt Centre will be a principal source for material on the composer and his work. At present any primary source material beyond scores and recordings is limited; however, a few DVDs have been produced that have the direct involvement of Pärt himself, and these are discussed further in this book. Eventually we can hope that there will be monographs on all the major works, biographies of the composer, and comprehensive analyses of the music. Much of this will happen once the Pärt Centre is open and scholars have access to Pärt's notes and manuscripts.

The emphasis of this book is Pärt's choral and organ music (contextualized within his complete oeuvre), because it is the largest and arguably most significant portion of his output and has not yet received any systematic and detailed treatment. According to Pärt, "Vocal music is the main root of music . . . the first and most perfect instrument," so in these works we see not only the development of the tintinnabuli principles but also more recent music in which tintinnabulation is barely present.⁸ It is humbling to be writing about such music at this early stage in Pärt studies, and there are many ways this could have been done. I hope my readers will understand my intention and forgive my execution if they find it lacking.

My text doesn't attempt to cover everything; however, it has several specific goals outlined in the introduction. It is both compendium and guide, and to that end I have included at least a brief description of every piece that is written for, or can be played on the organ and every work that includes one or more singers. I have also included, for context, reference to Pärt's instrumental works. Certain pieces receive greater description and analysis because they demonstrate important aspects of Pärt's style and technique. I try to show the core for each piece, what Pärt called the "nucleus."⁹ The pieces are linked by reference to those aspects of Pärt's

⁶ For example, Schenbeck, "Discovering the Choral Music of Estonian Composer Arvo Pärt."

⁷ For example, Cargile, "An Analytical Conductor's Guide to the SATB A Cappella Works of Arvo Pärt"; Davidson, "Ancient Texts, New Voices"; and Kongwattananon, "Arvo Pärt and Three Types of His Tintinnabuli Technique."

⁸ Margaret Throsby, interview with Pärt; cited in Greenbaum, "Arvo Pärt's *Te Deum*."

⁹ "In the compositional process I always have to find the nucleus first from which the work will eventually emerge. First of all I will have to get to this nucleus." Quoted in Smith, "Sources of Invention," 20.

biography that are relevant, but in general I do not deem this to be a necessary element to understand his music. I have instead concentrated on providing a broad but comprehensive survey. I utilize and develop interdisciplinary methodologies drawing on media, cultural, and theological studies as well as different analytical approaches to music, including my own innovative approach to analysis of the tintinnabuli style.

At this stage in Pärt studies scholars have developed numerous themes regarding the composer and his work, and this work has influenced most of the major writings so far. These themes include his personal (Orthodox) faith, the wider spirituality of his music and its ecumenical influence, the mechanics of tintinnabulation and the lack of satisfactory methods of analysis, the influence of ECM Records, his reticence speaking about his life or music, and his public persona. To this I add the topic of performance practice, which has become increasingly relevant (and complex) as more performers tackle this revolutionary new music.

These tropes have often been quite narrow in their discussion. For example, much has been said and written about Pärt and contemporary spirituality and, in particular, about the special way Pärt's music resonates with so many people on a mystical or spiritual level, but it has tended to repetition of certain basic connections with fairly superficial characteristics of the music. The relationship with spirituality is an important aspect of Pärt's appeal; however, here I have taken a more theological approach, dealing specifically with the texts Pärt sets and how Christians and non-Christians alike can interpret them. My work also explains certain aspects of the Orthodox Christian Church, of which Pärt is a member, analyzing how this influences both his thinking and his composing.

Pärt's music is mostly published by Universal Edition, and their web site for the composer contains a great deal of information concerning his music, including, in many cases, access to select pages of the scores.¹⁰ I have not duplicated all this material, but have referred to it throughout. This text does not include translations for texts such as the Magnificat, which are easily available online; however, it does include some that are not so easily available.

Each chapter provides the most accurate information currently available about each work, including the commission (where applicable), composition, and premiere. For each piece, I include (where available and relevant): the title (and a translation into English), the date of composition

¹⁰ www.universaledition.com/composers-and-works/Arvo-Paert/composer/534.

and of any revisions, details of the text (translated into English), scoring, length, publisher, commission, dedication, premiere, and recordings. Each work has a short descriptive and analytical essay that provides useful information for both performers and listeners, especially about the compositional procedures employed. Where appropriate, connections are made to other works by Pärt and cross-referenced.

The principal work in this current text has been done directly with the published scores, which are almost exclusively published by Universal Edition. Most scores include revisions (which are often acknowledged in subsequent editions), and many have been rescored or reworked in other ways. Numerous sources confirm that Pärt continued to make changes to the music during the rehearsal period or recording period.¹¹ The information presented here corrects errors in previously published catalogs and notes, especially the revisions that Pärt has made to different pieces and the various versions of pieces that currently exist.¹² Detailed work on every piece is beyond the scope of this book, and much work remains to be done; however, it is clear that Pärt is perfectly comfortable with continued revisions to his work, many of which are made for performances or recordings. What this means for performers is confirmation that a variety of interpretations of the notes are possible, and this is explored further in Chapter 7.

The text is organized chronologically because in this way I can attempt to convey a developmental history of Pärt's style and technique. It would have been revealing to have discussed works grouped, for example, by subject (the Psalms, for example) or by language (the works in Estonian such as *Meie Aed* and many of the songs for children); however, at this foundational stage in Pärt studies a chronological approach makes more sense.

Much writing about Pärt to date (including the *Pärt Companion*) has been biographical, or about the tintinnabuli style, or through the lens of cultural studies, or concerning Pärt and spirituality. This text is firmly rooted in the repertoire and provides information on many pieces that have so far not been written about at all. In addition, by working on issues of performance practice and interpretation, it endeavors to bridge the traditional gap between scholars and performers.

¹¹ See, for example, the note on the UE website for *Littlemore Tractus*: www.universaledition.com/Arvo-Paert/composers-and-works/composer/534/work/7124.

¹² Pärt has frequently revised his work, providing different arrangements and improving or correcting individual pieces. This is an interesting concept, and the current text will examine it as a philosophy as well as a musical practice, and I detail essential changes in select works.

Principally it addresses directly the largest group of people who encounter Pärt's music: the audience. The text is specifically aimed at the listening experience. Pärt once said: "I could compare my music to white light, which contains all colors. Only a prism can divide the colors and make them appear; this prism could be the spirit of the listener." By providing biographical context, analyses, and interpretation, this book provides listeners with tools to be able to hear even more colors in this music. The experience is perhaps paralleled in the cover picture to this book by Gerhard Richter.¹³ In the foreground broken lines form a transparent grid to the piece. They fade, however, and reveal an extraordinary depth to the painting in the same way that the tintinnabulation lines can be heard and are evidently structural; however, they too fall away to reveal music of great depth and beauty.

¹³ Richter, *Abstract Painting*, 1995.

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Thanks are due to the staff at the Pärt Centre in Estonia, especially Ardo Västriik and Kristina Körver; to Chris Watford at Universal Edition for his generous help with scores; and to Aygün Lausch at UE who has processed and granted my numerous requests for permissions.

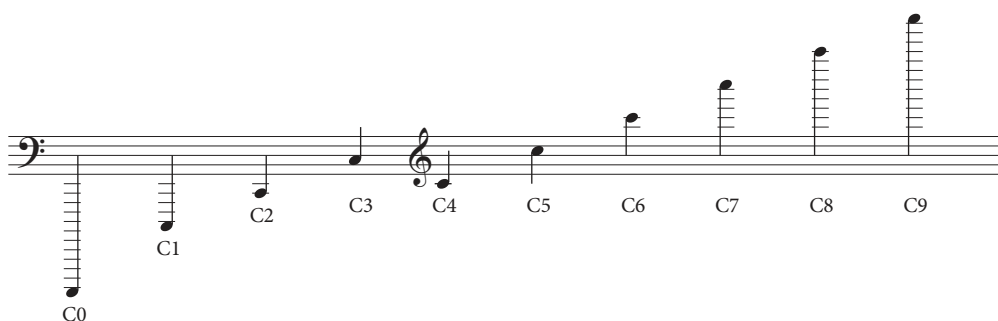
Bringing critical appreciation of the music of Pärt to a wider audience has been a collaborative effort, and I acknowledge many colleagues who share my interest and who have inspired and supported my work, especially Laura Dolp, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Robert Sholl.

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Author's Notes

- All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The original language for quotations has been omitted unless the source is unpublished or the meaning obscure and subject to more than the usual degree of interpretation.
- Musical pitches are denoted by capital letters. Octave position is indicated by the use of a superscript according to the following American Standard Pitch Notation (ASPN) scheme:



- Numbering of the psalms differs between Hebrew (Masoretic) and Greek (Septuagint) manuscripts. Pärt generally follows the Eastern Orthodox method of using the Greek number but noting the Hebrew number for clarification.
- Titles of Pärt's works have become standardized in different languages even for English speakers. This text follows standard practice rather than translating all titles into English. So, *Our Garden* is the common usage for the Estonian-language cantata *Meie Aed*, and *Spiegel im Spiegel* for the various arrangements under that title and not the English "Mirror in Mirror."
- Some titles of Pärt's works have been rendered entirely in lower case letters as part of the "house style" of Universal Edition and ECM Records. For this volume they have been normalized with initial capitals where appropriate.
- Comments, additions, and corrections to this text are welcome by the author and should be sent to andrewshenton@post.harvard.edu.