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| **Pärt, Arvo (1934-)** |
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| Arvo Pärt is an Estonian composer whose music has had phenomenal success worldwide since his radical stylistic change from an overtly modernistic aesthetic to a radically simplified, post-tonal idiom. Still as a student under Heino Eller, he caused a sensation in Moscow and Leningrad with the première of *Nekrolog* (1960), the first dodecaphonic work to be written in Estonia.  In 1962, however, Pärt received the first prize in the Competition for Young Composers held in Moscow for *Meie aed* (‘Our Garden’, 1959), a tonal work, and for the oratorio *Maailmaa samm* (1961). Between 1958 and 1967, he worked as an engineer at Estonian Radio, afterwards working in Tallinn as a freelance composer. |
| Biography Arvo Pärt is an Estonian composer whose music has had phenomenal success worldwide since his radical stylistic change from an overtly modernistic aesthetic to a radically simplified, post-tonal idiom. Still as a student under Heino Eller, he caused a sensation in Moscow and Leningrad with the première of *Nekrolog* (1960), the first dodecaphonic work to be written in Estonia.  In 1962, however, Pärt received the first prize in the Competition for Young Composers held in Moscow for *Meie aed* (‘Our Garden’, 1959), a tonal work, and for the oratorio *Maailmaa samm* (1961). Between 1958 and 1967, he worked as an engineer at Estonian Radio, afterwards working in Tallinn as a freelance composer. Following the aesthetic reorientation foreshadowed in *Credo* (1968) and the Symphony no. 3 (1971), in 1980, he was allowed to leave with his family for Israel, but instead remained in Vienna for a year and a half. He was awarded a DAAD scholarship in 1981-2 which meant that he could live in West Berlin, where he has retained a residence ever since.  Pärt's vast public success owes much to the series of recordings made by the German label ECM, beginning with *Tabula Rasa* in 1984, and with the subsequent collaboration of the English group the Hilliard Ensemble (notably the recording of *Passio* in 1988). He has also received a number of academic prizes, from Estonia (1978 and 1989), Austria and Germany (the Heinrich Strobel Foundation in 1980), Sweden and Switzerland (1983) and again Austria in 1984. Style Pärt's first works, the *Partita* and the two *Sonatinas* for piano (1958) are, stylistically, neoclassical, but in the dodecaphonic *Nekrolog* (1960) he was already distancing himself from the the serial technique which he had absorbed from the books by Herbert Eimert and Ernst Křenek. The work was dedicated to the victims of fascism, and caused a strongly negative reaction impression amongst the Soviet press, Pärt being specifically chosen for censure by the First Secretary of the Union of Composers, Tikhon Khrennikov.  Towards the end of his serial phase, Pärt began investigating aleatoricism and sonorism, though in his earlier serial works sonorism had already been quite evident. Thus, in the brief *Perpetuum mobile* for orchestra (written in 1963 and dedicated to Luigi Nono), the series grows vertically, above the cluster from which it is derived.  Pärt also explored techniques from earlier music: the title of the Symphony no. 1 (1964), ‘Polüfooniline’ – ‘Polyphonic’ – already betrays this interest, even though its structure is serial. In Symphony no. 2 (1966), the work's darkness and brutality are unexpectedly derailed by a quotation from Tchaikovsky's *Album for Children* (1878). The breakdown in vocabulary apparent in Symphonies nos. 1 and 2 was hastened by the composer’s embracing of quotation (increasingly, of baroque music) and collage, as may be clearly seen in *Collage zu B-A-C-H* for oboe, harpsichord, piano and strings (1964) the 'cello concerto *Pro et Contra* (1966), whose very brief slow movement is based on a stereotypical lamenting baroque cadential figure, and finally *Credo* (1968), which takes the idea of collage to an extreme, Pärt's own music being completely obliterated by that of Bach.  *Credo* (1968), for piano, mixed choir and orchestra, also caught the attention of the authorities on account of its spiritual content, but for the composer it was the end of a road, the end of his first creative period. There followed a period of almost total silence, interrupted only by two works, the Symphony no. 3 (1971) and the cantata *Laul armastatule* (‘Song of the Beloved’, 1973, revised 1974). Pärt's new stylistic trajectory provoked enormous surprise in the cultural world of the time, when many composers had fought for the right to employ avant-garde procedures. In addition, the role of religion in his music was increasingly evident. The Biblical content of *Saara oli* *üheksakümmend-aastane* (‘When Sarah was 90 years old’ for soprano, violin, double-bass or two electric guitars, harpsichord and percussion, 1976) was hidden by the composer behind the neutral title of *Modus*.  The composer’s meeting in 1970 with Andres Mustonen, founder and director of the early music group Hortus Musicus, led to a period of intense study of medieval chant and polyphony and renaissance music, which in due course had its effect on the music he was composing. It was also during this period that Pärt reorientated himself spiritually, being received into the Russian Orthodox Church. All these factors led to the composition of the Symphony no. 3 in 1971, which employs polyphonic writing according to the principles of the renaissance music he had been studying, but built on material derived from Gregorian chant and expressed in Brucknerian orchestra guise.  After these works, Pärt reassessed completely his compositional premises, finding a new vocabulary that rejected the modern, bases as it was on triads and the resonance of bells, thus earning the name ‘tintinnabulation’, the technique employed in a long series of works written around Christian themes after 1976, including *Arbos*, *Fratres*, *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten* and *Tabula Rasa* (all 1977), *Passio* (1982), *Te Deum* (1984-5), Stabat *Mater* (1985), *Litany* (1994/6) and *Kanon Pokajanen* (1997) and a vast number of short *a cappella* choral compositions. More recent works such as the piano concerto *Lamentate* (2002) and the Symphony no. 4 (2008) have shown an interest in re-engaging with the composer’s past work, the former in particular suggesting a survey of his compositional life. Selected List of Works *Meie aed*, children's chorus and orchestra (1959/2003)  *Nekrolog,* orchestra op.5 (1960)  Symphony No. 1 *Polyphonic* op.9 (1963)  *Perpetuum mobile*, orchestra op.10 (1963)  *Quintettino* op.13, wind quintet (1964)  *Collage sur B-A-C-H*, oboe, string orchestra, harpsichord and piano (1964)  Symphony No. 2, orchestra (1966)  *Pro et Contra*, cello and orchestra (1966)  *Credo*, chorus, orchestra, piano (1968)  Symphony No. 3, orchestra (1971)  *Wenn Bach Bienen gezüchtet hätte ...,* piano, wind quintet, string orchestra and percussion (1976)  *An den Wassern zu Babel saßen wir und weinten*, choir and organ or ensemble (1976/1984)  *Für Alina*, piano (1976)  *Pari Intervallo*, organ (1976/1981)  *Fratres*, chamber ensemble (1976; many subsequent arrangements also exist)  *Missa syllabica*, chorus and organ (1977)  *Summa*, chorus (1977)  *Cantus In Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, string orchestra and bell (1977)  *Tabula Rasa*, two violins, string orchestra and prepared piano (1977)  *Arbos*, brass and percussion (1977/1986)  *When Sarah Was Ninety Years Old*, three voices, percussion and organ (1977/1990)  *Spiegel im Spiegel*, violin or cello and piano (1978)  *De profundis*, mens voices, percussion (ad lib.) and organ (1980)  *Annum per annum*, organ (1980)  *Passio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem*, soloists, vocal ensemble, choir and ensemble (1982)  *Te Deum*, chorus, string orchestra and tape (1984–1985/1992)  *Stabat Mater*, 3 voices and string trio (1985)  *Trivium*, organ (1988)  *Magnificat*, chorus (1989)  *Miserere*, solosts, choir, ensemble and organ (1989/1992)  *Berliner Messe*, SATB soloists or chorus and organ or string orchestra (1990/1992)  *Summa*, string quartet (1990)  *Silouan’s Song*, string orchestra (1991)  *Litany*, soloists, chorus and orchestra (1994)  *Kanon Pokajanen*, chorus (1997)  *Cantique des degrés*, chorus and orchestra (1999/2002)  *Orient & Occident*, string orchestra (2000)  *Salve Regina*, chorus and organ (2001)  *Lamentate*, piano and orchestra (2002)  *In Principio*, chorus and orchestra (2003)  *Passacaglia*, violin, string orchestra and vibraphone (2003/2007]  *L'Abbé Agathon*, soprano, four violas, four cellos (2004/2005)  *La Sindone*, orchestra and percussion (2006)  Symphony no. 4 *Los Angeles* (2008)  *Adam's Lament*, mixed choir and string orchestra (2009) |
| Further reading:  (Bernhardt)  (Bradshaw)  (Fanning)  (Fisk)  (Hillier)  (Hillier, Arvo Pärt - Magister Ludi)  (McCarthy)  (Mellers)  (Moody, The Mystic's Point of View)  (Moody, The Mind and the Heart: Mysticism and Music in the Experience of Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Composers)  (Moody)  (Pinkerton)  (Quinn)  (Restagno)  (Smith) |