

Arvo Pärt – Tintinnabuli style, religious implications

Dragoş Mihai COHAL¹

Abstract: *Born in 1935 in Estonia, the child Arvo Pärt studied piano, then attended courses at the School of Music, where he played the oboe, as a percussionist in the orchestra and sang in the choir. He graduated the composition class at the Tallinn Conservatory, having Heino Eller as a professor. The basis of tintinnabuli compositional style, as Paul Hillier (Paul Hillier – Arvo Pärt, New York, Oxford University Press 1997, 96) describes, is a two-part texture consisting of a ‘melodic’ voice, moving mostly gradually, from or towards a central pitch and a ‘tintinnabuli’ voice sounding the notes of the tonic triad. The transition of Arvo Pärt towards his re-affirmation as a composer has a component of personal development in the field of spirituality and religion. In the years around 1971 he meets his second wife, Nora, who will catalyze his renunciation to the Lutheran confession in favor of the Christian Orthodox religion. In an interview, Jamie McCarthy (McCARTHY, Jamie An Interview with Arvo Pärt, Musical Times 130, March 1989) asks him about his feelings regarding a possible influence of the Russian Orthodox religion upon his work. Pärt answers: “Religion influences everything. Not just music, but everything”.*

Key-words: *Arvo Pärt, tintinnabuli, religion*

1. Arvo Pärt in the context of 20th century compositional techniques

Arvo Pärt was born in Estonia on 11 September 1935 in Paide, the county town of Järva. He was an only child and when his parents divorced when he was three years old, he was raised by his mother and stepfather in Rakvere, a small town about 60 miles from Estonia's capital Tallinn. Pärt studied piano, music theory and music literature (outside of general education classes) at a children's music school in Rakvere (Paul Hillier 1997, 26). At home he had an old Russian concert grand piano on which he could study and compose. Pärt says: “As a small child I used to play around the house. I had a huge grand piano, but it was in such a bad condition that it almost had to be thrown away. When I was about seven or eight, I started piano

¹ PhD, Braşov Opera, Romania, dragos.cohal@unitbv.ro

lessons. It wasn't very satisfying because the middle register of the piano was broken. So, I only played notes in the lower and higher registers. That way I was combining fantasy with reality. When I got older, I changed the mallets so that they would play in the middle register, but the striking of the strings was not as even, because the mallets didn't fit exactly. I was composing a lot for piano at that time." (Martin Elste 1988, 338).

This experience of not being able to play in the middle register of the piano may have been one of the factors that influenced his compositional style in the late 1970s. The great distance between the low voice ("drone" - a term used by Hillier, with the approximate correspondence of the *ison* in psaltic music, with the addition that the "drone" can sing in any register, not only the low register - Paul Hillier 1997, 84) and the pair of "Tinnabuli voice and Melodic voice" (*Ibidem*, p. 92.) found in works such as *Für Alina* or *Spiegle im Spiegle*, confirms the importance of this childhood experience.

Throughout school, Pärt also studied the oboe and percussion, and sang in a choir. Since his main instrument was the piano, he played in many concerts, especially as piano accompanist. His compositional skills evolved from simple piano improvisation to more serious compositions by the time he was 14, 15 years old (*Ibidem*, p. 26). He performed his first piano composition in a competition for young artists at the age of 17, without winning any prizes. The piece was called *Melody* and the author recalls that the work showed Rachmaninov's influence and that, in any case, "it was not personal music" (*Ibidem*, p. 26).

In 1953 he finished secondary school and went to the capital Tallinn, where he continued his studies at the Middle School of Music, taking intensive courses in preparation for admission to the conservatory. After graduating in 1957 from these "uchilishche", studies, Pärt entered the Tallinn Conservatory in the autumn of the same year (Wright 1992, 11.)

Between 1958 and 1963 he studied composition at the conservatory with Heino Eller, himself a pupil of Alexander Glazunov. This fact is of great importance, since we learn from Susan Bradshaw that "Pärt acknowledges the Russian composer as 'his father in music'" (Susan Bradshaw 1983, 25). Paul Hillier (his biographer) states that Pärt was an outstanding and talented student who found it relatively easy to absorb new ideas and techniques from his teacher (Paul Hillier, *op. cit.*, p. 27). As a result, his compositional style developed, opening up new horizons for the avant-garde techniques he would use in the early part of his career. In addition to his traditional musical education at the conservatory, Pärt also learned sound engineering. As a student in Tallinn he began to work as a sound engineer at Estonian Radio, a local radio station, and his collaboration with the radio continued until 1968. After that, Pärt became a freelance composer, writing mostly film music.

His compositions came to public attention in the late sixties and included various musical styles and techniques ranging from tonal neo-classicism to dodecaphonic serialism. Most of the works from the beginning of his composing career are for piano in the neoclassical style (Bostonia 2009, 6). In 1962 in Moscow he won first prize in the Soviet Union-wide Young Composers' Competition with the cantata *Meie Aed (Our Garden)*, composed in 1959, when he had already turned his attention to serial music. He studied the technique of dodecaphonic serialism from books and scores that were difficult to obtain in the Soviet Union. Even recordings of contemporary works were hard to come by at the time. Pärt said that the only contemporary pieces by „Western” composers he could hear were by Pierre Boulez, Anton Webern and Luigi Nono (McCarthy 1989, 130). This "poverty" of music is associated by Pärt with starvation. This is how he explains the impact that Western composers had on his music in the sixties: „Yes, (the music) was influenced by things like dodecaphony, serialism and aleatoric music; all these came to us from the West. Maybe others practised these in Russia too, but we didn't know anything about it. For example, when I was a student I had two volumes of exercises by Eimert and Krenek² and that was it, apart from some strange musical examples or illegal tapes. But we didn't need much knowledge - if someone says there's a country where people dance on one foot and you've never seen it, you can just try it if you want: you might do better than those who did it for the first time...! When people are hungry, their senses are alert to detect any trace of food. It's the same with ideas, especially in those times in the Soviet Union. The hunger for information was so great that sometimes you only had to hear one or two chords and a whole new world opened its doors.” (*Ibidem*, p. 130).

Nekrolog, composed in 1960, the first orchestral work of Pärt's career, is also recorded as the first serial twelve-tone work ever written by an Estonian composer (Hillier 1997, 35.). Although he was rebuked by critics for this attempt, Pärt continued to create, based on serial techniques throughout the sixties. Stephen Wright remarks: „over the next eight years (after composing his first serial work) Pärt integrated most of the avant-garde techniques of the time (including collage, aleatoric and extended instrumental techniques) into his work while retaining serialism as a compositional framework” (Wright – *op. cit.*, p. 1.). *Credo*, for solo piano, choir and orchestra is the "pivotal work" in Pärt's creation (Hillier – *op. cit.*, p. 58). Composed in 1968, it was the last collage-like work to combine tonal and atonal techniques in a serial context. Signs of the change to come in his composing can already be seen from this year. As Paul Hillier notes, Pärt is troubled by deep-seated concerns about the perennality of music in the context of 'progress' in art.

² Ernst Krenek (1900-1991) – Austrian composer and musicologist of Czech origin.

Herbert Eimert (1897-1972) – German theorist, musicologist, journalist and composer.

In an interview with Estonian Radio in the autumn of 1968, he said: „I am not sure that there can be progress in art (*Ibidem*, p. 65). Progress itself may be possible in science. Anyone can understand what progress means when it comes to the development of technology in the army and war. In art the situation is much more complex... many objects of art from the past appear to us to be much more contemporary than our current art. How do we explain this? (...) I think the modernity of Bach's music will probably never go away... the reason is not just that in absolute terms it might simply be better than contemporary music... the secret of contemporaneity lies in the question: how globally did the author / composer perceive not only his own present, but the totality of life with its joys sorrows and mysteries... It is as if we were given a problem to solve, a number (ONE, for example), terribly complex when divided into fractions. Finding a solution is a long process and requires intense concentration; but wisdom lies in reduction. (...) Always the most contemporary work is that which contains the clearest and most correct solution (ONE). Art is about eternal questions, not just about solving everyday problems. In any case, if we delve deeply into the essence of any musical work, regardless of genre, we cannot ignore the process of reduction. In other words, we have to throw away the ballast - the era, the style, the form, the orchestration, the harmony, the polyphony - in order to arrive at a single voice, its „intonations“. Only there do we come face to face with the question: 'Is it true or false?'”.

For several years after the *Credo*, Pärt turned his attention to the study of Gregorian monody and to exercises in tonal counterpoint in two voices, taking a path through which he would „learn again to walk like a composer“ (Hillier – *op. cit.*, p. 74). Kimberly Anne Cargile notes that during the period of „self-imposed silence“ between 1968 and 1976, Pärt published only one work, in 1971: the *Third Symphony*, in which, abandoning serial technique, he uses the sphere of tonal thematics with counterpoint imitations in the Baroque style (Kimberly Anne Cargile – *An analytical Conductor's Guide to the SATB a Cappella Works of Arvo Pärt*, Phd diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2008, p. 5). We learn from Stephen Wright that it was at the beginning of this period that Pärt first heard Gregorian chants and was completely overwhelmed by what he heard: he immediately set off in search of other examples, embarking on an intensive study of early music³, including not only Gregorian chant but also the music of the Notre Dame school, Guillaume de Machaut, Jacob Obrecht, Jan van Ockeghem, Josquin des Prez, Giovanni Palestrina and Tomás Luis de Victoria (Wright 2002, 358.). Pärt himself gives details of his need to stop composing: "I was convinced at the time that I could no longer

³ The terms „muzică veche“ (translated from the English: „early music“ or „old music“) often appear in Pärt's interviews, in articles, such as Wright's, or in Hillier's publication, *Arvo Pärt...*, and probably refer most often to music that preceded the Baroque era.

continue with the means at my disposal; I did not have enough material, and so I simply stopped writing music. I would have liked to get in touch with something alive, simple and non-destructive. I just wanted a simple musical line, with inner life and breath, such as existed in the songs of the ancient ages and still persists today in folk music; an absolute monody, a simple voice from which everything comes. I wanted to learn how to conduct the melody, although I had no idea how I could do that. I only had a volume of Gregorian chants, a „*liber usualis*”⁴, which I received from a church in Tallinn. I started singing those songs vocally and on the piano, with the same feeling I would have had if I had a blood transfusion - and somehow I successfully connected with that music. But I never used direct quotations from that genre, except for one work (*Statuit ei dominus*) that I wrote for the cathedral in Bologna" (Restagno, *I seek a Common Denominator*, Musikblätter, March-April 2012, p. 7).

Arvo Pärt met Andres Mustonen, the founder of the early music group "Hortus Musicus", in the early 1970s, a group that would perform his works for the first time after 1976. In addition to his interest in Pärt's scores, Mustonen is receptive to the vocal-instrumental interpretation of early music (especially that of the Franco-Flemish School) and participates intensively in rehearsals and concerts given by the Estonian early music ensemble.

The transition to re-establishing himself on the composition scene also has a component of personal evolution in the field of spirituality and religion. Around 1971 he met Nora, his second wife, through whom he renounced his Lutheran confession in favour of the Orthodox Christian religion. Asked by McCarthy to what extent he thinks the Orthodox religion has influenced his music, Pärt replies, „Religion influences everything. Not just music, but everything” (McCarthy, *op. cit.*, p. 132). Hillier also states that during this period „it is clear that the whole structure and direction of his life found a new meaning, encapsulated in his conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church and crystallised in his discovery of the *tintinnabuli* style, the two being inseparably linked” (Hillier 1997, 68).

From this period of silence in Pärt's compositional life "sprang a new conception of the relationship between sound and silence in his music" (Oranit Kongwattananon, *Arvo Pärt and Three Types of his Tintinnabuli Technique*. Master of Music (Music Theory), November, 2012). In an interview with Jamie McCarthy in 1989 Pärt said: „The composer, through silence, can contemplate whether or not he has something important to write; in this way only significant ideas will appear in the work” (McCarthy 1989, 132.). After about eight years of searching, Arvo Pärt

⁴ *Liber usualis* is a book of common Gregorian chants compiled by the monks of the Benedictine Catholic onastery Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, France, around 1900.

found his own compositional style: *tintinnabuli*. According to the meaning of the word, (related to the Latin *tintinnabulum*, bell), the original compositional technique created by Pärt has as its central idea the relationship between the main sound generated by the striking of the bell and the resulting harmonics. The relationship between these voices is the generative engine of the entire compositional system: a texture achieved by superimposing the „Melodic Voice” with the „Tintinnabuli Voice” (Both notions were introduced by Hillier in 1997 with the publication, in collaboration with Pärt, of the book *Arvo Pärt*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 92). Although the new technique was influenced by Medieval and Renaissance music, the texture and functionality of this musical style cannot easily be described in terms of a single compositional technique from the past. When audiences come into contact with *tintinnabuli* works, the words 'silence' and 'stillness'⁵, are often mentioned, both in relation to the music itself and in the abstract sense of the concept (McCarthy, *op. cit.*, p. 132). In Romanian, both terms (*silence and stillness*) are suggestive for *tintinnabuli* works: these works are indeed mostly of a generally quiet (introspective, meditative-religious) character and abound with moments of silence, in which the music is repeatedly interrupted by (unusually) long general pauses. Pärt elaborates on this idea by explaining that "the most important things that happen between two people - for example two people who are very close to each other - are not stated, they are impossible to express. Nothing needs to be said, and nothing should be said. However, things like this are very important. There is a kind of barrier, and when one feels this barrier and the force of such things, I think one has to pause often. These people say a lot. They pick up where they left off in the conversation, or they prepare what's next. Or the silence left between them can be simply like taking a deep breath, or a heartbeat. I think we need to be much more concerned with pauses and reflection, and evoking that reflection and that condition of stillness for the people for whom we create our art" (*Ibidem*, p. 132).

In the early 1980s Arvo Pärt and his family emigrated to Austria (with the help of the Universal Edition production company) where he received Austrian citizenship. Afterwards, following a scholarship from the *German Academic Exchange Service*, he moved to Berlin in 1981, where he continued his work as a composer until after 1992 when he returned to his native country. He currently divides his time between Berlin and Tallinn, Estonia.

⁵ From the English *silence*, meaning „liniște/stillness”, „tăcere absolută/absolute silence” (nouns) but also „liniștit/silent” (adjective).

2. *Tintinnabuli* style

Regarding the meaning of the term, Hillier says: "it should be emphasised that Pärt's style, *tintinnabuli*, developed intuitively. The association between trison and the prolonged way in which bells ring was originally made by Nora Pärt (and discussed in a concert hall programme of 1977), so that the name *tintinnabuli* was adopted only after the technique itself had already been fully formulated" (Hillier, *op. cit.*, p. 97).

In an interview with musicologist Enzo Restagno, Arvo Pärt describes the *tintinnabuli* style as follows: „Essentially the concept is comparable to what normally happens when one learns to play the piano; the left hand continues to play the same chord while the right hand unfolds the melody. In my case there is a melody and three sounds - but each note of the melody is associated with one of these three sounds according to very precise rules - and vice versa, of course. Obviously, unexpected dissonances result, but there is a logic there, just as there is a logic in the three accompaniment sounds, even if (it) is rather hidden" (Restagno, *I seek a Common Denominator*, Musikblätter, March-April, 2012, p. 8).

Hillier associates Pärt's compositional technique with medieval and Renaissance music. In his understanding, *tintinnabuli* is a simple structure based on a unique relationship between melody and harmony, between vertical and horizontal dimensions - gradual gait and arpeggio leaps. The harmony does not move, but only gravitates to one side and the other to create a melodic unfolding: 'In medieval music and in the initial phase of Renaissance polyphony, harmony is formed from the confluence of constituent voices so that harmonic analysis becomes at least secondary. Similarly, in *tintinnabuli* music, where harmony does not 'move', the harmonic framework has been pushed to the periphery to form a musical line, and the relationship between the two⁶ types of melodic movement creates a harmonic resonance that is essentially trisonic alongside the fluctuating presence of diatonic dissonance. What we hear can be described as a single moment unfolding in time" (*Ibidem*, p. 90).

According to Paul Hillier's description, „at the heart of the *tintinnabuli* system is a two-voice texture (always operating note for note), consisting of a „Melodic" voice⁷ (*the M voice*) moving mostly gradually from or towards the central tone (often, but not always, tonic) and a „Tintinnabuli" voice (*the T⁸ voice*) intoning the

⁶ It's all about 'gradual gait' and 'arpeggio leaps'.

⁷ The term *voice* is used here, and in all other cases, to name a distinct melodic line.

⁸ Terms borrowed from terminology used by Hillier, *op. cit.*, p. 96 (from M-voice and T-voice) to be used in this paper from now on in abbreviated form: the M-voice and the T-voice.

notes of the tonal trisone⁹. (...) If the *M-voice* is composed anyway¹⁰, the *T-voice* is subordinate to the *M-voice* by a relationship that is never random, but governed by a unique principle that can operate in different ways: the *tintinnabuli* note is always a note in the trisone (other than the unison or octave) linked in a specific and constant way to the melodic note. Once a particular relationship is chosen, it is constantly adhered to" (Hillier 1997, 92-93).

Hillier describes the characteristic sound of the *tintinnabuli* system as „a mixture of diatonic scales and trisone arpeggios in which the harmonic staccato is supported by the constant presence (actual or suggested) of the trisone tonic. This sound is not just a texture composed of scales and arpeggios, but the result of a very specific compositional technique developed by Pärt in isolation, and deeply influenced by the study of early music¹¹. This technique is based on very lucid principles, which were not created arbitrarily, but are the result of a process of observation and re-evaluation of the meaning of tonality (...) He thus sought to re-establish tonality as the basic structure of musical expression, but without the functional stereotypes of the Classical and Romantic eras. (...) The elements of tonal music can be reduced to the use of the trisone and the diatonic scale, which can be seen as two sides of the same coin - a tonality expressible both horizontally and vertically. The scale defines a particular set of intervals, moving gradually from a central note either up or down" (Hillier, *op. cit.*, p. 90-91.).

There are also opinions that *tintinnabuli* music is modal or medieval. Hillier, however, refutes these assumptions: 'There are many aspects of *tintinnabuli* music that give rise to ideas that label it as „modal”: it is not modulated and there is virtually no chromaticism; the harmony¹² is not „functional” - it does not express a structural sense of tension and relaxation; and the constant presence of tristate is suggestive of the idea of droning¹³, a characteristic feature of modal music. (...) *Pärt's tintinnabuli music is a new mixture of tonal and modal forces* (the emphasis is mine). The use of tempered tuning and the insistent presence of the tristate categorically refute the idea that this music is neo-medieval. By the same token, the tonal staccato distances it from conventional tonality, since the presence of the same trisone neutralizes any functional capacity of sounds foreign to the basic chord (Hillier, *op. cit.*, p. 92)."

⁹ The term *tonal* indicates the initial gravitational centre of the work, without the classical functional connotations of tonality.

¹⁰ Meaning it has more freedom to build.

¹¹ The term *early music* is used to indicate the Medieval and Renaissance periods.

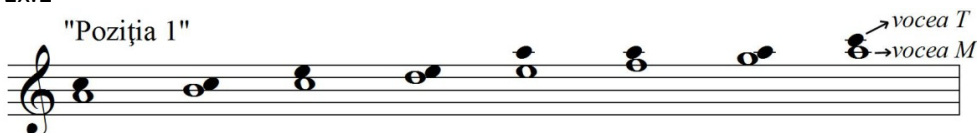
¹² Hillier's note, 'the word „harmony” is to be understood here in its fundamental sense, as a vertical aggregate of sounds occurring at a given moment'.

¹³ The equivalent of the *ison* in Byzantine music.

According to Paul Hillier, the *T-voice* can be located relative to the *M-voice* in two positions, depending on the intoned note in the tonic trisone; at the same time, the *T-voice* can remain fixed above (*upper* location), below (*lower* location), or it can alternate above or below (*alternating* location) relative to the *M-voice*. We can thus have two kinds of positions (as functional distance), with the three variants of reporting relative to the *M-voice* (as spatial location) (Hillier 1997, 93):

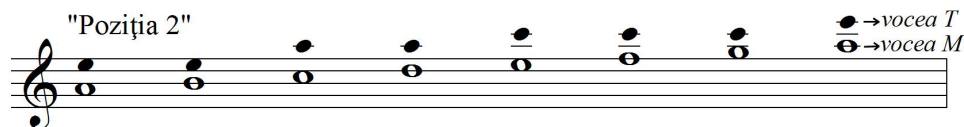
1. "Position 1", in which the *T-voice* intones the sound in the tonic trisone¹⁴ that is closest to the *M-voice* (the examples are built on a simple A minor scale, where the *T-voice* is represented by the black notes):

Ex. 1



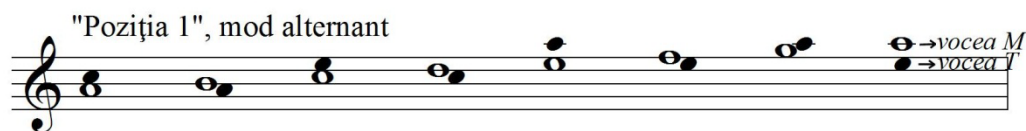
2. „Position 2”, in which the *T-voice* does not intonate the nearest sound, but immediately the next sound in the tonic trisone:

Ex. 2



Hillier also notes that in practice, „Position 1” is frequently used in alternating mode,

Ex. 3



while „the 2nd position” is normally used with upper or lower fixed location” (Hillier, *op. cit.*, p. 94).

¹⁴ The term *tonic trisone* is an intonational reference indication, without the classical functional connotations of tonality (in this case the trisone is *A minor*).

Ex. 4

"Poziția 2", localizare *superioară*

Ex. 5

"Poziția 2", localizare *inferioară*

A detail considered of great significance (since the *tintinnabuli* style is built on principles of symmetry) is that in the *alternating* mode of the *T-voice* one can start either from above or below. A detail that enriches the possibilities of vertical expression of the *tintinnabuli* system is also the fact that "any *T-voice* can be transposed to any different octave. Such a transposition can give the illusion of a 3rd *T-position*" (*Ibidem*, p. 94).

As can be seen in the example below, the *T voice* intones the sound furthest from the tonic trisone, within an octave of the *M voice*; essentially it is an octave transposition of the "1st Position", the lower mode:

Ex. 6

Transpunerea la octavă a "Poziției 1", localizare *inferioară*

Melodic voice has, according to Hillier (*Ibidem*, p. 95-96), four distinct modes of construction within the *tintinnabuli* style:

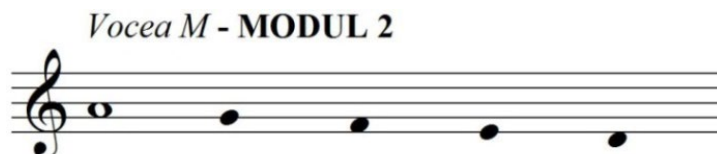
The first mode gradually ascends from the base note (tonic) to the *tintinnabuli* trison:

Ex. 7

Vocea M - MODUL 1

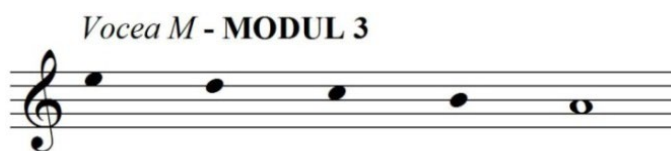
The second mode is similar to the first except that instead of going up, the *M-voice* gradually goes down from the *T* tonic:

Ex. 8



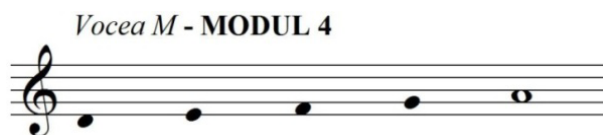
In the case of **the third mode** the *M voice* gradually descends to the bottom of the *T trisone*:

Ex. 9



The fourth mode occurs when the *M voice* gradually rises to the *tonic T*:

Ex. 10



David E. Pinkerton II (Author of dissertation entitled *Minimalism, Gothic style and tintinnabuli in Pärt, in selected works*, Duquense University, 1996) compiles a list of stylistic elements characteristic of Arvo Pärt's music after 1976. The following chart is a modification of the summary published in the *Elements of Style* section of the Pärt website (www.arvopart.org – © David E. Pinkerton II 1997-2010):

Elements of style in tintinnabuli music:

Rhythm	- long note values
	- medieval rhythmic motifs (hocket - see below) used systematically and discontinuously from voice to voice
	- medieval rhythmic modes ¹⁵

¹⁵ Johannes de Garlandia în the work *De Musica mensurabili* identifies 6 rhythmic modes (*apud* David E. Pinkerton II, *op. cit.* p. 17).

Melody	- the melody ¹⁶ generally unfolds by gradual gait
	- diatonic (chromaticism is almost entirely avoided)
	- use of ecclesiastical modes (especially Byzantine but also Gregorian)
	- medieval procedures such as Organum, Cantus firmus, Isonus
	- use of short motifs in repetitive patterns
	- it is the text that determines the musical phrase's prosody (arsis & thesis)
	- most of the chosen texts are sacred (from the Christian religion)
Harmony	- heterophony, more often used than chordal (vertical) "sound block" harmony
	- harmonic stasis (absence of modulations)
Sound organisati on system	- pandiatonic ¹⁷ (system using diatonic material without functional tonal limitations)
	- minor keys are used most frequently
Tempo	- slow, long-breathed
Breaks	- (surprisingly) long general breaks (often, systematically and repetitively used)
Dynamic	- small nuances used unusually much (in time), especially in the beginning and end of the music
	- the transition from one nuance to another is generally sudden, without crescendo or decrescendo
	- frequent use of extreme dynamics
	- full, sustained sounds are generally preferred
Forms	- "mirror" type, often found in instrumental music
	- determined exclusively by the text, in choral works
Writing	- homophonic and homorhythmic, heterophonic
	- use of textural contrasts
	- use of voices in close proximity in contrast to extremely large space between voices (in the overlapping of two or more melodic lines)
	- the entry and exit of voices during the work is done in total independent relation to each other

¹⁶ The term melody refers to the Melodic Voice, with the exception of the Tintinnabuli Voice, whose performance is in generally arpeggiated.

¹⁷ *Tintinnabuli* adheres to this system through diatonicism, avoidance of tonal-functional chordal chaining and functional non-resolution of dissonances.

Principles Used	- economy of means (extreme reduction of the constituent elements of the music)
	- symmetry, systematizations ¹⁸ and algorithms (involving all the constituent elements of musical discourse)
	- time dilation principle (use of drone / ison, sounds on long note values)

3. Religious implications

As mentioned above, the *tintinnabuli* texture consists of two voices (melodic lines) with distinct functions: the Melodic voice (*M-voice*) and the Tintinnabuli voice (*T-voice*). Hillier associates theological terms such as "sin" and „forgiveness" with these voices, Pärt himself describing the *M-voice* as embodying the subjective world, subject to everyday sin, while the *T-voice* signifies objectivity, the redemption of sins. The *M-voice* can arise freely and spontaneously, while the *T-voice* is always in close relation to the former. This image can be linked to „eternal duality" such as „body and spirit" or „earth and sky". Finally, the *tintinnabuli* texture tends to illustrate the mathematical paradox¹⁹ of $1+1=1$, because in the end the *M-voice* and the *T-voice* are one and the same voice (*Ibidem*, p. 92).

Hillier sums up the idea that Pärt's constant use of the tristate in the *tintinnabuli* style (without the baggage of tonal functions with which it was loaded in the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) was a choice that Pärt "could not avoid for much longer, and only by complete immersion in this world was he now able to create a music of essences, a music of few notes, but of great power and purity. (...) Starting from the recognition of Pärt's religious leanings (evidenced by his choice of texts and by his own comments on the music), to associate his perception of tonality with the perception of God would be too obvious, and at the same time too bold an interpretation. In this sense we might regard 'tonality', represented by the constant presence of the major and minor tristate, not as a symbol, but rather as a manifestation of God. Such a sacred vision of music is neither unique nor eccentric;

¹⁸ Pärt says: „(...) structure is a vessel used to transport feelings and gestures. I don't trust the flow of my music without mathematical structures" (Jeremy Beck 1995, 1).

¹⁹ An enigmatic equation proposed by Nora Pärt, the composer's wife, and warmly embraced by him. A musician herself (and a conductor), she played an active role in Arvo's artistic and compositional life. She is often present in written or televised interviews, often formulating explanations and theorisations of the *tintinnabuli* style that sometimes exceed her husband's powers of synthesis (he himself asks her for help in formulating answers when faced with questions that put him in difficulty).

it has correspondences throughout the history of music, and is found in abundance in non-Western music, which, moreover, does not feel the forced resistance of an old materialistic society" (*Ibidem*, p. 92).

Nora Pärt talks about *tintinnabuli* from the perspective of the state of consciousness that this music awakens in the listener, forcing him to sharpen his senses and increasing his attention so much that he is totally transposed into a „new dimension” where all experiences are magnified as if they were looked at through a microscope: „The concept of *tintinnabuli* was born out of a deep-seated desire for an extremely small world of sounds, that cannot be measured in kilometres, or even metres, but only millimetres. In my experience, the listener becomes more and more sensitised as they are drawn into this dimension. Towards the end, the listener's attention is totally focused. To such a degree that, after the music has died down, it is extremely relevant to hear the breath, the heartbeat, the sound of stage lights or, for example, the air-conditioning system. The composer lures us into this unknown dimension with seemingly "familiar" and harmless musical material (Geoff Smith 1999, 22.).

Pärt himself confesses that even for him, this dimension of the *tintinnabuli* style remains a mystery: „*Tintinnabuli* is an area I sometimes wander into when I am looking for answers - in my life, in my music or in my work. In my darkest hours, I feel like everything but this one thing is meaningless. Complexity and variety only deepen my confusion and I find myself searching for unity. What exactly is this one thing, and how can I find my way to it? Traces of this perfect thing appear in many guises and everything that is not important falls apart. So is *tintinnabuli*. Here I am alone with stillness. I've discovered that a single note is enough, when beautifully sung. That single note, or a simple pause, or a moment of silence comforts me. I work with very few elements - one voice, two voices. I build with the most primitive of materials - with a tritone, with a certain key. The three notes of the tritone are like bells. That's why I call it *tintinnabuli*” (Quote taken from the *Tabula Rasa CD book*, ECM records N. 1275, Germania, 1984).

3. Conclusion

The stylistic-interpretive analysis of Arvo Pärt's *tintinnabuli* works, is a complex phenomenon that cannot be applied in a generalised way to his entire post-1976 oeuvre, as each work, with its unique features, requires a special approach. There are, however, certain common interpretative features in terms of the way the sound is emitted, the colouring of the vocals, the timbral homogeneity, the

involvement and participation of the performers in the musical act, their attitude to the artistic act in general.

The decisive factor in the interpretation of Arvo Pärt's music remains the component of emotion that arises from communion with the Creator. The search for and manifestation of the state of the sacred is an essential ingredient, and I would even venture to say an obligatory one, in the most faithful shaping of the sound for any performer who approaches the *tintinnabuli* style.

References

- Beck, Jeremy. 1995. *Arvo Pärt: Notes from Oregon*, vol. 25, no. 4. New York: The Society of Composers.
- Bostonia, Marguerite. 2009. *Musical, Cultural, and Performance Structures in the Organ Works of Arvo Pärt*, Unpublished PhD. Diss., West Virginia University.
- Bradshaw, Susan. 1983. „Arvo Pärt.“ *Contact* nr. 26, spring.
- Cargile, Kimberly Anne. 2008. *An analytical Conductor's Guide to the SATB a Cappella Works of Arvo Pärt*, Phd. diss. University of Southern Mississippi.
- Elste, Martin. 11 April 1988. *An Interview with Arvo Pärt*. Fanfare.
- Hillier, Paul. 1997. *Arvo Pärt*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kongwattananon, Oranit. 2012. *Arvo Pärt and Three Types of his Tintinnabuli Technique*. Master of Music (Music Theory).
- McCarthy, Jamie. March 1989. “An Interview with Arvo Pärt.” *The Musical Times* 130.
- Pinkerton II, David E. 1996. *Minimalism, the Gothic Style and Tintinnabulation in Selected Works of Arvo Pärt*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquense University.
- Restagno, Enzo. 2013. *Arvo Pärt allo specchio. Conversazioni, saggi e testimonianze*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- Smith, Geoff. 1999. “An Interview with Arvo Pärt: Sources of Invention.” *The Musical Times*, Vol. 140, No. 1868.
- Tabula Rasa CD book, 1984. Germany, ECM records N. 1275.
- Wright, Stephen. 1992. *Stylistic Development in the Works of Arvo Pärt, 1958-1985*, Master's thesis. University of Western Ontario.
- Wright, Stephen. 2002. „Arvo Pärt.“ In *Music of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde: a Biocritical Sourcebook*. London, ed. by Larry Sitsky. Greenwood Press.

[http://www.arvopart.ee/en/Selected-texts/as-purely-cleanly-and-simple-as-possible.](http://www.arvopart.ee/en/Selected-texts/as-purely-cleanly-and-simple-as-possible/)

[http://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part-2/honorary-degrees-awards/.](http://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part-2/honorary-degrees-awards/)

<http://www.arvopart>