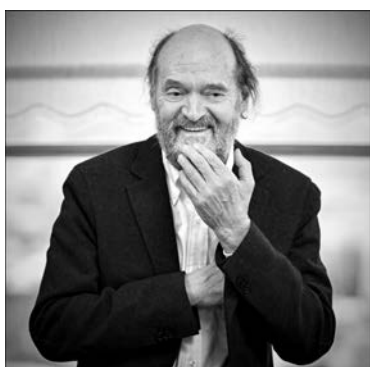


## The Pärt Phenomenon

by Andrew Shenton

**Editor's Note:** In celebration of Arvo Pärt's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday on September 11, 2020, Andrew Shenton, Professor of Music at Boston University and Pärt scholar, kindly agreed to contribute a feature article along with scholarly resources. Shenton has labored to organize conferences and enrich scholarship about this esteemed Estonian composer.



Arvo Pärt, photo by Kaupo Kikkas  
© Arvo Pärt Center

My attention was drawn to Pärt's music in the early 1990s as many European and US choirs and orchestras began to program his works. As I started to perform his music myself I became fascinated with how the new tintinnabuli technique that he developed around 1976 could produce results of such enormous beauty that seemed to genuinely touch so

many people. By 2010 it was clear to me that Pärt was not just a composer but a phenomenon and, puzzled by why he had not been studied with any seriousness, I decided to devote some time to finding out more about this fascinating man and his extraordinary music.

Pärt was born in Estonia in 1935, studied at the Tallinn Conservatory and embarked on a career as a composer as well as working as a sound engineer for Tallinn Radio. Those of you not familiar with his life and works can read his [official biography](#) on his website, and this introductory article from *The Guardian* titled "[A guide to Arvo Pärt's music](#)" is a quick read and has some good listening recommendations.

Pärt's innovative tintinnabuli technique is elegantly simple: it consists of just two lines, a melodic line (M-voice) ...

Issue No. 14  
Christmas 2020  
Pandemic Edition

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# Annual Meeting: Online 2021



As you may have expected, the SCSM's annual meeting will be held entirely online in February 24-27, 2021. We have a great program of papers, posters, lecture recitals, a keynote address, and a graduate student panel. Please watch your email and the [SCSM website](#) for more details about the schedule and registration soon.

Mercer University has already extended their invitation to host the annual meeting in 2022 since it's not possible this year. Thanks go to SCSM member, Nathan Myrick!



**2021 Annual Meeting Fees:** Pay the amount that is fitting for you this year: \$25/\$50/\$75. All funds collected beyond what it costs SCSM to present the conference will go to the Graduate Student Travel Fund to support future SCSM annual meeting attendance by graduate students.

**NB:** Membership renewal is separate from Annual Meeting registration—remember to do both!

*The Pärt Phenomenon continued...*

that usually moves by step, and a tintinnabulation line (T-voice) that only uses the pitches of a 'tonic' triad. These two lines are heard together as a single composite line, which prompted Pärt's wife Nora to describe it in metaphoric terms as "1 + 1 = 1." The first tintinnabuli piece, *Für Alina* (1976, for piano) sets out the basic procedures for tintinnabulation in a work that has become iconic. At its most simple, and in its early iterations, tintinnabuli music has several key features:

- it is homophonic
- it is homorhythmic
- it does not adhere to the functional use of common practice harmony
- it does not use chromatic pitches
- it does not modulate
- musical phrases are usually short
- silence is utilized as a significant compositional device
- it is usually in a slow tempo
- it does not change tempo
- dynamics are generally quiet
- it has a general mood of peaceful introspection
- a formalized compositional plan is based on a series of interrelated rules

Silence is an important compositional device in this style and contributes to the sense of stasis and stillness in much of his music, and this in turn contributes to the numinous quality that is widely admired.

After the late 1970s Pärt developed tintinnabulation to include mathematical variations such as inversion and retrograde, and he also became ...

[\(continued on page 4\)](#)

## From the President

Mark Peters

One of my favorite albums right now is Ruth Moody's *These Wilder Things* (2013), which I've especially been listening to with my oldest daughter, Elyssa. The album begins with these words:

This world is full of trouble and woe,  
This world is full of trouble and woe,  
All I see is trouble everywhere I go,  
I'm gonna sing the trouble that I know.

Ain't that the truth. But I'm not using this song to wallow in the uncertainties and tragedies of our current world (I can do that without a song!). The song is actually a beautiful message of hope that claims us as co-workers for a better future. In the spirit of the Blues, "Trouble and woe" names what is wrong with the world, then sings through the trouble to a place of hope. The present realities haven't changed, but our perspective on them has.

This world is full of promise and love,  
This world is full of promise and love,  
Promise of a new day with no dark clouds above,  
I'm gonna sing that world I'm dreaming of.

May this be true for us in the work of Christian scholarship in music, that we sing toward and work toward the world we're dreaming of. May it also be true that through this work we continually remind students, colleagues, fellow scholars, and ourselves of this vision.

I am grateful for the work of so many in the SCSM this year who are doing this for our society. I'm grateful for the recent work of the program committee and the nominating committee, as well as the executive committee's ongoing work to envision our first online conference in February.

Yes, this world is full of trouble and woe. But we're going to sing the world we're dreaming of.

Peace,  
Mark

**Mark Peters** is professor of music and director of the Center for Teaching and the Good Life at Trinity Christian College.



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increasingly interested in how a text could be used to generate musical material. These complications to the basic procedure meant that tintinnabulation could be deployed in large-scale works, as epitomized in the first mature work, *Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem* for soloists, mixed choir, instrumental quartet and organ (1982). In this piece Pärt articulates the formal structure by assigning key areas to different characters in the narrative and by employing a sophisticated relationship between punctuation and rhythm that precisely determines the composition of each phrase of music. As part of his creative process Pärt has often spoken about the need to get to the nucleus of an idea, from which the work will emerge. He achieves this by a process of reduction, which for him is different from simplification. It is, in his words, an “economy of expression,” which also has metaphysical or religious overtones: “The M-voice always signifies the subjective world, the daily egoistic life of sin and suffering; the T-voice, meanwhile, is the objective realm of forgiveness. The M-voice may appear to wander, but it is always held firmly by the T-voice.” The religious aspect of Pärt’s life and music is of course an essential element in understanding his music. In 1972 Pärt joined the Orthodox Church and his profound faith has been at the forefront of his compositional practice ever since. He has claimed that “religion influences everything. Not just music, but everything,” and the majority of his works are religious and text-based.

Over time, Pärt’s strictly controlled compositional procedures have given way to more freedom as he gained confidence with the tintinnabuli style. Sculpture and architecture have been associated with some of his larger works from this period including *Lamentate* for piano and orchestra (2002), which is related to the sculpture *Marsyas* by Anish Kapoor (and which Pärt described as a “lament for the living”); and *Silhouette* for strings and percussion (2009), which is inspired by the structure of the Eiffel Tower.

Pärt has received many high-profile commissions, including *Adam’s Lament* (for choir and orchestra), which was commissioned by the Cultural Capital cities of Istanbul in 2010 and Tallinn in 2011. Based on a text by one of Pärt’s favorite writers, St. Silouan the Athonite, the ECM recording conducted by Tõnu Kaljuste won a Grammy award in 2014, and the piece was later staged in a collaboration with the director Robert Wilson that premiered in Tallinn in 2015.

## Pärt Resources

### Arvo Pärt Centre

The Pärt Centre is an excellent resource for information about the composer, including his official biography and works lists, along with information about his archive and select information about research and performance.

### Selected Books on Pärt

Bouteneff, Peter; Jeffers Engelhardt; and Robert Saler (eds). *Arvo Pärt: Sounding the Sacred*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020.

Dolp, Laura (ed). *White Light: Arvo Pärt in Media, Culture, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Shenton, Andrew (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Shenton, Andrew. *Arvo Pärt’s Resonant Texts: Choral and Organ Music 1956-2015*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

### Recordings of Pärt’s Music

Recordings on the ECM record label were recorded in the presence of the composer and carry his imprimatur.

A comprehensive list of recordings can be found at the Discogs site.

## Pärt Scholarship

by Andrew Shenton



Arvo Pärt, photo by Priit Grepp © Arvo Pärt Center

Although there are many interviews and reviews of his music, it was not until 1998 that any significant scholarship was published. Paul Hillier, director of the Hilliard Ensemble (a group whose early performances of his music were key to his popular success) wrote a short monograph in the OUP Composer series that was the principal reference for over a decade. In 2010 I organized a conference at Boston University, the first dedicated entirely to Pärt, which sought to broaden the discussion, and to find people who were also interested in researching this music. Because Pärt is also a cultural phenomenon (by virtue of his public persona, the high-profile use of his music in movies [including Oscar winners *There will be blood* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*], and the fact that Bachtrak named him the most performed living composer in the world every year from 2010-18), the conference included presentations on religion, technique, style, repertoire, biography, politics, and cultivated image. The best of these were put into the [Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt](#) (CUP: 2012) which I edited, and which updated and expanded Hillier's work. Laura Dolp wrote an essay for the *Companion* on "Pärt in the Marketplace," and continued her interest in the extra-musical side of the composer by collecting scholarship from several authors into a volume she edited titled [White Light: Arvo Pärt in Media, Culture, and Politics](#) (CUP: 2019). CUP invited me to write a more detailed monograph on Pärt and his music, which came out

in 2018. As the title suggests, [Arvo Pärt's Resonant texts: Choral and Organ Music 1956-2015](#) concentrates on the largest portion of his repertoire, however, it does detail and describe every piece written up to 2015.

In 2015 St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York signed a concordat with the Pärt Centre to extend the [Pärt Project](#) that was started at the Seminary a few years earlier by Peter Bouteneff and others. The Seminary organized a conference in NYC in 2017, and Fordham University Press is publishing selected essays from that conference on December 1, 2020 entitled [Arvo Part: Sounding the Sacred](#). Bouteneff also wrote a short monograph detailing religious themes in Pärt's work entitled [Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence](#) (SVS Press: 2015).

One of the most fascinating recent developments is the [Arvo Pärt Centre](#), a building complex about 40 kilometers west of Tallinn, that officially opened in 2018. The Centre houses Pärt's archive (sketches, manuscripts, scores, photos, and so on), which are being digitized and catalogued. It's also a concert hall and meeting place. Now that Pärt has a place in the Academy as well as in the public imagination the Centre will be a useful resource to future scholars who I hope will take on the serene beauty of Pärt's minimal aesthetic captured so well in this aphoristic statement by the composer himself: "I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cited in *Current Biography Yearbook 1995* (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1995), 456 and elsewhere.

# SCSM Member News, 2020



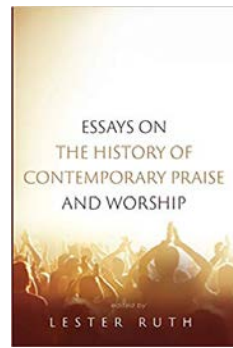
**Megan Francisco** (University of Washington) reports that “After 12.5 years in post-secondary, I'm officially Dr. Francisco!!!! So thankful for the friends that could attend (with negative Covid tests, of course) and those who supported me from afar. Thank you all!”



Congrats to **Stephen Crist** (Emory University) on his new publications: “My two most recent publications, with additional word last night of the imminent arrival of the proofs for my edition of J. P. Bach's ‘Aria scotese,’ which presumably will appear in early 2021.”

**Robin Wallace** (Baylor University) was [recently interviewed by Baylor University](#) about his book on Beethoven and disability, *Hearing Beethoven: A Story of Musical Loss and Discovery* (The Chicago University Press, 2018).

**Lester Ruth** (Duke University) has a few publications to announce. The first is an edited volume of essays released earlier this year, *Essays on The History of Contemporary Praise and Worship* (Wipf & Stock, 2020), including essays by SCSM members such as **Lim Swee Hong** (Emmanuel College) and **Adam Perez** (Duke University). The second is a forthcoming book co-written with **Lim Swee Hong**, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship: Understanding the Ideas that Reshaped the Protestant Church*. If you want to hear more from them, listen to Ruth and Hong’s interview (which starts about 6’40”) on [The Music and the Church podcast](#).



The Music and the Church Podcast with Sarah Bereza and Crawford Wiley

Ep. 3

**The History of Contemporary Worship**

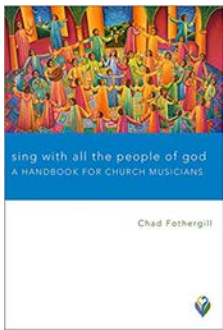
with Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth

sarah-bereza.com/episode3



In addition, **Dr. Ruth** and four of his Th.D. students in liturgical studies (including SCSM member, **Adam Perez** who also recently received a 2020

Dissertation Fellowship granted by Hispanic Theological Initiative) received a 2021-22 *Vital Worship Teacher-Scholar Grant* from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for a project on improving teaching through digital resources. Their project is entitled, [“The Contemporary Praise and Worship Research Podcast: Improving Pedagogy through Digital Resourcing.”](#) Congrats!

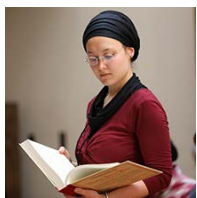


**Chad Fothergill** (Birmingham, AL) recently published a resource for church musicians and scholars, *Sing with All the People of God: A Handbook for Church Musicians* (Augsburg Fortress, 2020).

**Laura Benjamins** (Ph.D. Candidate in music education at Western University) just recently published her peer-reviewed article, “Learning through Praise: How Christian worship band musicians learn,” in the *Journal for Popular Music Education*, Volume 3, Number 3, 1 (December 2019), pp. 417-433.



**Erin Fulton** (Ph.D. candidate in musicology/ethnomusicology at the University of Kentucky) sent in this news:



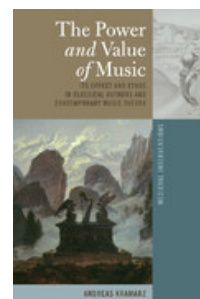
In late 2019, I began directing a project on the Benton Big Singing for the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History. [The project documents](#) the Southern Harmony singing tradition, encompassing interviews from lifelong singers in western Kentucky as well as relative newcomers from communities outside the traditional geographical, ethnic, and religious boundaries of Southern Harmony singing. At the request of the Society for the Preservation of Southern Harmony, I served as organizer and secretary for a digital event held in lieu of the 137th annual Big Singing.

The Sounding Spirit project, of which I am the music bibliographer, launched its pilot digital library in May. We are currently laying the groundwork for digitizing a projected list of more than a thousand additional volumes over the coming years. I compiled the accompanying resource, “Checklist of Southern Sacred Music Imprints, 1850–1925,” which should prove an exciting resource for scholars of American sacred music.

Besides my recent paper at SCSM, “‘Th’Embattled Legions of Earth and Hell’: Military Hymnody in 1840s America,” I have presented a few others, “Reading, Writing, and Recollection: Memorization in the Production of the Caster Family Account Book,” at the Society for American Music Conference, 2020; and “Sustaining the Sacred Harp Museum: A Case Study in the Management of a Small Special Library,” at the Southeast Chapter of the Music Library Association, 2020.

**Further resources:** [“Checklist of Southern Sacred Music Imprints, 1850-1925”](#); [data dictionary for checklist](#); and the [main Sounding Spirit Digital Library landing page](#).

**Nate Myrick** (Mercer University) has a forthcoming book, *Music for Others: Care, Justice, and Relational Ethics in Christian Music* (Oxford University Press, 2021). This should be out in time for our Annual Meeting in February.



**Fr. Andreas Kramarz LC** (Legion of Christ College of Humanities), a new member of SCSM, has a number of recent publications, which includes his book, *The Power and Value of Music: Its Effect and Ethos in Classical Authors and Contemporary Music Theory* (Peter Lang, 2016). Fr. Kramarz has also published a number of articles in the journal ...

## From the Editor

Early in my experience as a theologian at a graduate school focusing on the intersection of theology and psychology, I turned to the aesthetic theology of Arvo Pärt. His tintinnabuli compositions provided a musically embodied language for sin, grace, and the call into the goodness of the life of God. Theologian, Kathryn Tanner, articulates this invitation well,

Because we have been created to have such a close relationship with the very goodness of God, with a nature that requires attachment to God to what it is supposed to be, grace is necessary to complete our nature, to add to it what it requires for its own excellent operations and well-being. Receiving God's grace becomes a requirement for simply being a human being fully alive and flourishing (*Christ the Key*, 60).

This is a beautiful vision of the Christian life to teach and embrace, yet I realized early on that the doctrine of sin, in particular, was inherently complicated because it had often been misused and misconstrued, causing emotional harm to many of my students. As theologian Alistair McFadyen argues, sin language has often been discounted, trivialized, or ridiculed in part because many believe "that sin is a language of blame and condemnation (encouraged by its flourishing in religious enclaves where it is used to whip up artificial and disproportionate senses of personal guilt and shame...)" (*Bound to Sin*, 3). McFadyen fears that if sin language is ignored Christians will not be able develop a robust language for sin or grace in our spiritual lives, and as a result will not be able to nurture and engage the baptismal directive to resist and stand up to evil and injustice in the world. For theologians, such as Tanner and McFadyen, to misunderstand or ignore the relationship between sin and grace undermines not only Christian worship, but also the call of the gospel to live justly, mercifully, and humbly with God and neighbor.

With this in mind, I now begin my lectures on sin with Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* (for Cello and Piano, 1978), a musical icon of how God's grace holds us in enduring love even when we wander far from our home in God. This music invites each one of us into participation in God's goodness and life, and as the great Christmas hymn proclaims, "His law is love and his gospel is peace. / Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother, / And in his name all oppression shall cease."

Blessings in this season and in 2021!

Chelle Stearns

## Member News continued ...

*Greek and Roman Musical Studies*: "Is the Idea of 'Musical Emotion' Present in Classical Antiquity?" (Feb. 23, 2017), "Christian Reception of the 'New-Music' Debate in the Church Fathers and Clement of Alexandria" (Aug. 24, 2018); "Sounds of War: What Brought the Walls of Jericho Down?" (Aug. 20, 2019); and "Music and the Divine" (Mar. 13, 2020). Congrats on your publications and welcome to SCSM!

SCSM has finished the forthcoming edited collection of essays, *Sacred Music in the Americas*, edited by **Andrew Shenton** (Boston University) and **Joanna Smolko** (University of Georgia) and will be published in early 2021 by Rowman & Littlefield. This is a wide-ranging and enjoyable volume about the power of sacred song within society, religion, and the lives of individuals. Stay tuned for news of this volume!



Many thanks go to Andrew Shenton (Boston University) for his wonderful contributions to our celebration of Arvo Pärt's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. May this scholarship enhance your listening, performing, and studying of this theologically significant composer!

If you have news, publications, conferences, and/or pictures to share with your fellow SCSM members, please email: [scsm.news@gmail.com](mailto:scsm.news@gmail.com)