

# Musica e spiritualità dopo la Rivoluzione francese

A CURA DI  
SUSANNA PASTICCI E ROE-MIN KOK

CHIGIANA – III SERIE, 5 – 2023



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dopo la Rivoluzione francese

edited by / a cura di  
Susanna Pasticci – Roe-Min Kok

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PÄRT AFTER PÄRT:  
THE COMPOSER AS PROGENITOR

*Abstract*

Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) developed a new compositional technique in the 1970s that has a peculiar mystery and enchantment. Called “tintinnabulation”, this music is static and ecstatic, elegantly simple, deceptively complex, visceral and remarkable, and is appreciated by large and diverse audiences. In addition to his original works, Pärt is the progenitor of a diverse array of sibling works which has further broadened his appeal. In this essay I survey some of the ways Pärt’s music has been used as inspiration by other composers and performers. I suggest that the creators of the derived works have mined Pärt’s music for elemental materials that resonate with secular spirituality. Using examples of sampling, arranging, pastiche, direct and indirect influence, improvisation, and digital manipulation, I conclude by acknowledging the intrinsic success of the sibling works which stand as empathetic tributes to the original while at the same time presenting a range of personal expression. The sibling works are fully accessible and utilised in secular rituals of performance, meditation, listening, and transformation. They are highly original and personal essays which attempt a hermeneutic of the original in aural form, often establishing new sound worlds and refining the essence of the mystery of the tintinnabuli technique.

Although Estonian composer Arvo Pärt has repeatedly had the distinction of being the most performed contemporary composer in the world, audiences are not universal in their appreciation of the prominent Christian content of much of his music.<sup>1</sup> They are, however, drawn to the peculiar mystery of tintinnabulation (the Latin for “sounding bells”), a compositional technique devised by Pärt in the 1970s. The general characteristics of these early untexted tintinnabuli pieces mean that it has now become commonplace to invoke Pärt at moments of reflection, emotional intensity, or nostalgia. The effect of Pärt’s music was summarised by commentator Alex Ross in an article in «The New Yorker» in which Ross noted that Pärt had «put his finger on something that is almost impossible to put into

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1. According to the classical event database Bachtrack, Pärt was the most performed living composer between 2012–2018, and again in 2022. He was second in 2019. Due to the Covid pandemic, no statistics were compiled for 2020 and 2021. See <<https://bachtrack.com/classical-music-statistics-2022>>; <<https://estonianworld.com/culture/arvo-part-is-the-worlds-most-performed-living-composer/>> [20 November 2023].

words, something to do with the power of music to obliterate the rigidities of space and time [and] silence the noise of the self, binding the mind to an eternal present».<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I survey some of the works based on Pärt's early untexted tintinnabuli music and suggest that creators of the derived pieces have mined this music for elemental materials that resonate with secular spirituality, and which have been reconstructed in refined forms that eliminate unnecessary characteristics or increase favoured ones, thereby expanding the reach of Pärt's tintinnabuli music far beyond what he might have expected. I conclude by acknowledging the intrinsic success of the sibling works which stand as empathetic tributes to the original while at the same time presenting a freedom of personal expression that has relevance for contemporary secular culture.

What Ross observes about Pärt's music are aspects of a much broader dimension to the functions of music which are summarised by philosopher George Steiner: «For countless mortals music, however vaguely, comes closer than any other felt presence to inferring, to forecasting the possible reality of transcendence, of an encounter with the numinous, with the supernatural as these lie beyond empirical reach».<sup>3</sup> This is exactly what people are seeking (and finding) in Pärt's music, a numinous encounter that bestows on both performer and listener a sense of grace and space. Of course, much of our response is derived from the natural human reaction to musical features of tintinnabulation such as its quietness and slow tempo, but many people find something magical and transformative about some of Pärt's music which amounts to more than the sum of its simple elements. The different modes of dissemination of his music meant that it found diverse audiences many of whom chose to engage with it not just as listeners, but as performers and creators.

Despite the comparatively small amount of general scholarly work on Pärt, the aspect of his music having spiritual content has been widely discussed. How this relates to religion (especially Christianity) is explored by Peter Bouteneff in *Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence*, and in many essays in the collection *Arvo Pärt: Sounding the Sacred*, which Bouteneff co-edited with Jeffers Engelhardt and Robert Saler.<sup>4</sup> Taking a different approach, musicologist Robert Sholl identifies the communicative power and appeal of tintinnabulation by examining it «in associated aesthetic concepts and meanings that apply to modernity, spirituality, and religion» in his

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2. Alex Ross, *Consolations*, «The New Yorker», 2 December 2002.

3. George Steiner, *The Poetry of Thought: From Hellenism to Celan*, New Direction Books, New York 2011, p. 17.

4. Peter Bouteneff, *Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Yonkers (NY) 2015; Peter Bouteneff – Jeffers Engelhardt – Robert Saler (eds), *Arvo Pärt: Sounding the Sacred*, Fordham University Press, New York 2020.

2012 essay *Arvo Pärt and Spirituality*.<sup>5</sup> Sholl regards the music as a form of enchantment, and concludes that «the spiritual enchantment offered by Pärt's music is deeply consonant with a search for a more rational, harmonious, and profound way of living».<sup>6</sup>

Spiritual enchantment as a catalyst for enlightened living is an important element of the sibling works and is rich in Pärt's early tintinnabuli music in large part because of its ability to encourage empathy. Musicologist Maria Cizmic discusses this in her essay *Empathy and Tintinnabuli Music in Film*.<sup>7</sup> For example, describing the power of *Spiegel im Spiegel* [Mirror in Mirror, 1978] to invoke a self-reflexive mode, she explains the features that make this possible, suggesting that «its slow tempo, spare texture, and repetitive nature allow plenty of space to listen carefully to relatively few elements».<sup>8</sup> These are important features for those who find inspiration in Pärt's music.

### Pärt and Tintinnabulation

Born in 1935, Arvo Pärt's legacy currently includes more than one hundred pieces. They are in many genres but mostly chamber and choral works, many of which are written using the tintinnabuli technique. The pivotal piece in Pärt's early career was *Credo* [I believe, 1968] for piano, mixed choir, and large orchestra. This piece uses collage technique and is a compendium of compositional procedures including tone rows, extended vocal techniques, partly improvised sections, and quotation of the Prelude in C Major from Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*.<sup>9</sup> The premiere was controversial and caused political difficulties for Pärt. That aside, it was clear that he was dissatisfied with the work, which lacked authenticity. So, after composing *Credo* Pärt stepped back from composing for several years as he rethought his compositional and aesthetic stance. When he emerged from this self-imposed reflection he began composing in a new style.

At its most simple, and in its early iterations, Pärt's new compositional technique has several key features which can be seen in the first tintinnabuli work, a short piece for piano solo titled *Für Alina* [For Alina, 1976]. The technique comprises two musical lines that have a fixed relationship: one uses the notes of the tonic triad and is commonly labelled the tintinnabuli or T-voice, while the other

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5. Robert Sholl, *Arvo Pärt and Spirituality*, in Andrew Shenton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, p. 141.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

7. Maria Cizmic, *Empathy and Tintinnabuli Music in Film*, in Laura Dolp (ed.), *Arvo Pärt's White Light: Media, Culture, Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017, pp. 20–47.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 43. *Spiegel* is one of Pärt's most performed works and is discussed further below.

9. For a detailed analysis of *Credo* see Andrew Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts: Choral and Organ Music 1956–2015*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018, pp. 24–29.

moves largely by step and is labelled the melodic or M-voice.<sup>10</sup> According to Pärt, *Für Alina* was «the first piece that was on a new plateau. It was here that I discovered the triad series, which I made my simple, little guiding rule».<sup>11</sup> The piece is fifteen measures long and lasts less than three minutes in performance. The music is homophonic and homorhythmic, it does not use chromatic pitches or modulate, musical phrases are short, silence or space is utilised as a significant compositional device, it is in a slow tempo that doesn't change, dynamics are quiet, and it has a mood of peaceful introspection (see Ex.1).

The compositional plan is based on a series of interrelated rules. The upper part is the melodic M-voice, the lower voice is the tintinnabuli T-voice which outlines the B-minor tonic triad. After two fundamental low Bs are struck (B<sub>0</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>), the number of sound events in each measure increases by one up to eight and then back again. It is appropriate to consider sounds rather than pitches because Pärt consider the two voices of his tintinnabuli technique to be a single compound sound. This led his wife Nora to suggest the formula 1+ 1 = 1 to describe the combination of two pitches as a single event.<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging the beautiful simplicity of this piece (which is evident even without knowing the technical system that created it) it is easy to understand how it resonates with so many people.

While *Für Alina* is one of Pärt's most venerated pieces, many of the early tintinnabuli works have found enormous popularity and are frequently performed. They include *Pari Intervallo* [At Equal Intervals, 1976], *Fratres* [Brothers, 1977], *Tabula rasa* [Clean Slate, 1977], and *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* [Song in Memory of Benjamin Britten, 1977].<sup>13</sup> Being textless and thus not limited by additional semantic content, these works have been a rich source of inspiration for composers and performers who have utilised them in many ways as they sought to adapt the music for personal fulfilment and to enrich audiences.

Pärt's tintinnabuli technique and music is adapted in several different ways:

- a) by direct influence — which might be called “homage”, because it acknowledges Pärt and his music (particularly tintinnabulation) as influential on a new work as, for example, its use in sampling.
- b) by indirect influence — which is a harder category to define since Pärt's influence may be overt or covert and intentional or unintentional. However, since Pärt's tintinnabuli style has such a strong and recognisable aesthetic it

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10. For more information on the tintinnabuli technique see Leopold Brauneiss, *Musical Archetypes: The Basic Elements of the Tintinnabuli Style*, in Shenton, *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, pp. 49–75.

11. Wolfgang Sander, liner note for *Tabula rasa*, ECM New Series 1275 (CD), 1984.

12. Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997, p. 96.

13. These works are all discussed in Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, and on the web site of the Arvo Pärt Centre, <<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/>> [20 November 2023].

*Alinale*  
(For Alena)

Спокойно, воздержанно, безумства

Arvo Pärt  
1976

Piano

Ped.

Ex. 1. Arvo Pärt, *Für Alina*, bb. 1–7.  
Reproduced by kind permission of Universal Edition AG, Wien.

is notable as a distinct and unique voice in contemporary music with a particular appeal.

- c) in cover songs — although the music streaming industry calls every performance of a classical piece a “cover” of the original, here I mean it to be a substantial reworking of the original (through lengthening, improvisation, and other means), but which leaves enough elements of the original for it to be recognisable. I regard this as a different category to a straightforward performance of a piece which I would categorise as an interpretation.

- d) through improvisation — a specific type of cover song in which the original is stated in some form, but musical elements are improvised upon in more or less traditional ways.
- g) through digital enhancement and manipulation — in which the original is processed or enhanced by computer software to create a new work that acknowledges both the original and the process.
- h) through reorchestration and rearranging — both of originals and sibling works.
- i) through pastiche — which is the deliberate use of the tintinnabuli technique to write music that sounds like Pärt.

There is considerable crossover between these categories, however, this taxonomy identifies the principal ways that Pärt's music is developed. I concentrate on those sibling works that offer a new and contemporary dimension on the auditory experience of the divine because this is what Pärt's music invites from those who seek it. These new works function in a very specific way to create emotional and spiritual content.

### Pärt as Influencer

Although tintinnabulation has not yet become an established technique adopted by other composers (and this is in large part because Pärt's particular genius is in the way he utilises the varying degrees of dissonance to rich effect), many musicians cite him as an influence. While pastiche aims to replicate in some way a particular piece, technique, or style so that the original is instantly referred, influence is a more subtle approach that lifts aesthetic aspects as well as musical ones. The following is an example of this where Pärt is a direct influence through reference to a specific piece.

The opening scene of the 2014 British six-part television drama *The Crimson Field*, set in a field hospital during the First World War, shows a woman on a boat as she drops a ring into the water.<sup>14</sup> The music, by British composer Rob Lane, alludes to Pärt's *Für Alina* by the composer's own admission.<sup>15</sup> The scene is brief, however, we are witnessing the adoption of a Pärtian soundscape to signal an interior moment of reflection in the onscreen action. It is notable how the music helps to establish the mood, and how quickly the moment is broken. As musicologist Robert Sholl has noted, if we compare Lane's music with *Für Alina* it is easy to see how Lane's score is influenced by contour and gesture in Pärt's original. Here

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14. <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3494220/>> [20 November 2023].

15. For more see Robert Sholl, *Pärt and the Sound of One-Hand Clapping*, in Dolp, *Arvo Pärt's White Light*, pp. 74–96.



Fig. 1. Arvo Pärt © Pritt Grepp, courtesy of the Arvo Pärt Centre.

Lane has fluently captured the essence of *Für Alina* and manipulated it so that it correlates to onscreen the visuals.

Pärt's music has been in the public imagination for decades and has been widely disseminated in both performances and recordings. In particular, the recordings on the ECM label have cultivated a strong image for the composer and the recordings themselves are noteworthy for their high standards of performance and engineering. Pärt's relationship with the Hilliard Ensemble has also been important since the sound of this group suits Pärt's music well and these factors have all combined

to contribute to Pärt's popularity and impact. There is an increasingly large number of musicians who cite him as an influence, including Björk, Keith Jarrett, Sigur Rós, and Radiohead, and much more work needs to be done to survey the extent to which this happens. As an example, I will discuss one of the earliest notable engagements with Pärt's music as stimulus on another work which comes from the Chicago hip-hop artist Lupe Fiasco. It is interesting because it raises some important points about Pärt's sphere of influence, his relationship with unchosen collaborators, and how he currently negotiates issues of copyright.

## Sampling

In 2007 Fiasco sampled the 1996 Harmonia Mundi recording of Pärt's choral work *De Profundis* [Out of the depths, 1977/1980/2008].<sup>16</sup> The piece is scored for male chorus (TTBB) and organ with percussion (ad lib.). The text is Psalm 130: «Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord hear my voice». It is set syllabically in Latin with one measure per word, and, depending on the configuration of the voice parts, they can function as either T- or M-voices. Pärt starts on low E<sub>2</sub> in the bass II part, and, in turn, the voices gradually rise from the stygian depths to a climax on the text "Misericordia" (mercy).<sup>17</sup> The voices are used according to a simple formula of combination until the last few phrases where Pärt breaks the pattern and uses all four voices. The organ part is continuous and comprises both M- and T-voices. The percussion is intermittent but frequently used to indicate the end of textual phrases and adds a rich sonic dimension to the whole.

Fiasco's track *Little Weapon* (featuring Bishop G and Nikki Jean) from the album *The Cool* is a fascinating employment of Pärt's music as a sample.<sup>18</sup> The violent lyrics of this song decry both gun violence and child soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Pärt's music is clearly heard twice starting at 0:27; however, it is aurally present in the tonality and the beat, and the alignment of the text of the psalm clearly mirrors the sentiment of Fiasco's lyrics. In this case, a sibling work utilises a texted work to create a contemporary protest song on an ancient Christian lyric that has contemporary appeal.

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16. Paul Hillier – Theatre of Voices, *Arvo Pärt*, Harmonia Mundi HMU 907182F (CD), 1996. Pärt frequently revised his works or reorchestrated them so they are often listed with multiple dates. Using his own web site (<<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/works/>> [20 November 2023]) as the authority, *De Profundis* was "completed" in 1980; however, the UE performing score number 17410 lists 1977 as well as 1980. Minor revisions were published as UE score 32973 which lists just 1980. In 2008, the composer arranged the piece for male choir and chamber orchestra (UE 34321).

17. Specific pitches are noted using American Standard Pitch Notation in subscript where middle C is C<sub>4</sub>.

18. Lupe Fiasco, *The Cool*, Atlantic Records 756789959–9 (CD), 2007.

19. [www.songlyrics.com/lupe-fiasco/little-weapon-lyrics/](http://www.songlyrics.com/lupe-fiasco/little-weapon-lyrics/) [20 November 2023].

More often though Pärt's untexted works are used as this avoids overtly Christian content and the lack of any distracting text is more suitable to the end goal of most of these works which is meditative.

The prevalence of Pärt's music to the extent that it has been noticed and appreciated by a rap artist is an important point, but it has practical implications. With this example, and with many others, there are issues of copyright. Whether Pärt has formal or informal arrangements with the musicians who use his material is not clear, nor is it necessarily important since Pärt is evidently allowing them to be publicly presented. Most of the examples I note credit the composer and name the work, and there are now mechanisms by which companies such as YouTube and Spotify can automatically distribute proceeds to the original creator as well as the author of the derived work.

There is both an underlying philosophy and a strategy by Pärt for allowing these sibling works to be available since he speaks of performers as collaborators and of his music as a link between two humans: «Then suddenly an interpreter comes along, who plays something out of this empty space in such a way that you feel within yourself that this is no longer your music. In fact, it isn't my music. The music is simply a bridge between us, and what the interpreter does is very beautiful».<sup>20</sup> It is likely that he considers the sibling works as a bridge between two humans based on an original work that he has given up to the world. Since so many sibling works remain online uncontested by Pärt or his agents it is likely that his music will continue to be the inspiration for other creators.

## Cover Versions

A more direct and accountable use of specific works by Pärt (as opposed to the general tintinnabuli technique) is the category of derived works that are cover versions and that are improvised based on Pärt's originals. Two of the earliest of these are featured on the 1999 ECM *Alina* album.<sup>21</sup> The daring program for this album includes three versions of *Spiegel*. Placed between these are two tracks based on *Für Alina* improvised by pianist Alexander Malter. While the original version of *Für Alina* lasts less than three minutes, Malter had prepared an extended improvisation lasting around seven hours from which Pärt selected two extracts, each lasting around eleven minutes.<sup>22</sup> These excerpts allow the listener a chance to inhabit this sound world a little more fully. Malter's improvisations keep the fundamental characteristics of the original in terms of key, pitches, tempo, and dynamics, but allow him to revisit in a more extended forum some of the aural beauty of this

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20. Martin Elste, *An interview with Arvo Pärt*, «Fanfare», March/April 1988, p. 340.

21. ECM New Series 1591 (CD), recorded in 1995, released in 1999, remastered in 2015.

22. <<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/pärt-alina>> [20 November 2023].

sparse and fragile music. The improvisation that lasts 10:47 starts with a B-minor chord rather than the low Bs (perhaps because it is a segment of a longer improvisation). The low Bs are reinserted after measure 7 which shifts perception of time in the otherwise regular repeats of the original and means the low resonance lasts further than usual into the ensuing measures which is aurally interesting. His second track (titled *Für Alina – Reprise*) is similar in most respects, though differentiated by small changes such as the omission of the last six measures in the second repeat and at the end the omission of last two pitches for the left hand and last pitch for the right hand (which means that it ends on an unresolved dissonance, though in context it does not sound either dissonant or unresolved).

Returning to the task of trying to identify the characteristics of Pärt's music which people appreciate it is interesting to note the language used by Tyran Grillo in his 2010 review of this album. Grillo wrote: «*Alina* is filled with more emptiness than substance, all the while forming through that emptiness a substance far greater than its own vocabulary can express. It enacts a unique sort of transfiguration which, through the quietude of its own coalescence, ends up turning into itself».<sup>23</sup> This emptiness in the music, the essential lack of content, perhaps enables us to construct our own meaning for these pieces or to be brought to a state of meditation which is not distracted by individual features of the music but immersed only in its sound. For many people this leads, as Grillo notes, to «a unique sort of transfiguration». In *Für Alina* Pärt's music promises something which it fails to deliver in a quantity many people want, so it achieves a new state of perfection in Malter's longer versions.

Malter is not alone in having extended the work as a piano improvisation. On his album *Arvo Pärt: Für Anna Maria, Complete Piano Music*, pianist Jeroen van Veen interprets the original twice.<sup>24</sup> In addition, he also extemporises two longer versions. The Spotify track listed as *Für Alina (1976)* is typical of some of the techniques used by Malter (and others) which amounts to a kind of minimal extemporisation befitting Pärt's minimal music. Here again there is a strong fidelity to the pitches, tempo, key, and mood of the original. There is no modulation, no additional pitches, no faster tempo than indicated, and no virtuosity of technique.

In order to understand the form and concept of the derived work, the following is a brief chronological description of the form of Veen's improvisation which is comprised of eight repeats of the original with minor modifications:

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23. <<https://ecmreviews.com/2010/09/30/alina/>> [20 November 2023].

24. Brilliant Classics 94775 (2 CDs), 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCNRioytyAI>> [20 November 2023].

SECTION	TIMING <sup>25</sup>	SECTION TIME	DESCRIPTION
1	0:00	2:20	once through as written, quarter = 70, rit. at end
2	2:20	2:14	rh 8va, rit. at end
3	4:34	2:11	lh 8vb, tempo changes (freer), final phrase at pitch
4	6:45	2:12	as written
5	8:52	3:10	essentially slower quarter = 55, pause before section 6
6	12:02	3:00	lh 16vb rh 8vb
7	15:02	2:29	both 8vb
8	17:31	2:49	as written
End	20:18		

Veen generally holds the sustaining pedal until the dominant cadence in measure 11 (as indicated in the score) which, although it loses the low Bs from the opening, continues to promote the overtones and additional resonance from the undampened piano strings of the B-minor tonality of the piece. Veen's third version (lasting 23:07) uses the same techniques: nine repetitions of the original which is essentially unmodified except for changing the octave for either or both of the two voices and minor deviations in dynamic and tempo. Veen closes this version with a repeat of the low Bs from the start which is an interesting if somewhat obvious choice for an ending, but effective, nonetheless. With both his extemporised versions he places articulation emphasis on different pitches (presumably by choice though there is no easily discernible logic to it).

Two other musicians have produced versions that are notable for their originality within the appropriate parameters implied by the original. Tamara Anna Cislowska performs the piece on two tracks on her album *Into Silence: Pärt | Vasks | Górecki | Pelēcis*.<sup>26</sup> The first is a performance of the original lasting 2:31. The second, described as an "extended version", consists of four repeats and lasts 9:14. Margarita Vrubel's improvisation appears on an album simply titled *Arvo Pärt*. It consists of five repeats and lasts 10:21.<sup>27</sup> These acoustic versions follow essentially the same pattern as Malter: the original is stated at the outset and then is repeated several times with minor changes while keeping the original pitches.<sup>28</sup> Some players omit some measures in their repeats, and some restate the low Bs (usually after measure 7) to maintain its aural presence.

25. Timings based on Spotify versions are approximate and may vary depending on which source is used.

26. Australian Broadcasting Company ABC 481 6295 (CD), 2017.

27. Oclassica, 2023.

28. Occasionally, by virtue of instrumental needs, the work is transposed (such as the version for guitar by Esteban Colucci [5:11] which is played in A minor mode).

Recording technique is highlighted in most of these performances which generally adopt a close placement of microphones to the piano strings to capture the resonance of the two voices during the extended periods between new sets of notes, and this prolongation itself is frequently exploited. Unfortunately, for some recordings (especially Malter and Vruble) this results in disruptive sounds from the key action, though it has been mitigated slightly in the 2015 remastering of Malter's tracks.

While all of these are interesting there is little to distinguish between the performances since they all adopt such a conservative approach. It is possible that Malter was himself the progenitor of this particular style of improvisation on *Für Alina*. His recording has been around the longest and had Pärt's imprimatur, so it is conceivable that subsequent versions adopted his restrictive approach as homage to both men. The reality is that past a certain length these cover versions do not sustain active listening. With minimal elaboration on the part of the performer a track that exceeds ten minutes becomes one that is largely relegated to passive listening. This explains the proliferation of ambient covers explored further below.

There is no denying that *Für Alina* has captured a large segment of the popular imagination. In May 2023 Spotify listed more than three hundred versions of the piece, and, although most of these are piano performances of the original, there is a diverse array of arrangements and improvisations including the following representative examples, listed in order of length:

PERFORMER	INSTRUMENT	DURATION
Marco Lo Muscio	organ	2:56
Maksymilian Świąch	harpsichord	3:02
Charl du Plessis Trio	piano, bass, drums	3:54
Kuniko	vibraphone, crotales	3:58
Gunter Herbig	electric guitar	4:27
Daniel López-Vázquez	piano, drum	7:01
Peter Broderick	piano, synthesizer	7:10
Julia Rovinsky	harp	7:22
Pat Metheny	42-string guitar	8:31

These are generally more effective and engaging than the longer piano versions since the different timbres provide aural interest and none of them have been pushed beyond a reasonable time limit for active listening. The most successful of these is the version by Kuniko because the timbre of the vibraphone and crotales add a particular dimension to the sound origination, which is smoother and gentler than the piano hammer on a string, and because the reverberation of both these instruments is richer and more colourful than the piano versions. The least

successful is the version by López-Vázquez which adds a drum beat to every sound event in a way that does not add to its value but simply becomes annoying.

## Digital Enhancements

The cover version by Peter Broderick from 2020 pushes timbral changes even further. Broderick performs the piece three times on piano without changing pitches or octave but, on the second version, the low Bs are taken up as a sustained synthesised sound (at 2:20) with a faint aura of other pitches that grow increasingly loud and add a counterpoint to the original. This sustained fundamental disappears as the low pitches are restruck for the third recurrence at 4:40, however, the synth counterpoint continues, gradually fading away until it is no longer audible by the cadence in measure 11 (6:23). The piece concludes (at 7:10) with solo piano for the last four measures. Since the track is simply titled *Für Alina* and, since no other information is available on streaming services, the additional sounds are a surprise on first hearing, but they are an effective addition and easy to listen to.

Digital manipulation and synthesised sounds are an excellent way to personalise different musical aspects from Pärt's original, while at the same time intensifying the essential empathetic mode of the music. One of the most interesting and successful of these is the version by American ambient musician Rafael Anton Irisarri, which goes well beyond Broderick's use of synthesised sound. Irissari's 13:56 cover of *Für Alina* utilises the minimal musical characteristics which map onto the general qualities of ambient music.<sup>29</sup> The term "ambient" was introduced in its contemporary usage by composer Brian Eno to describe an atmospheric music that lacks a strong beat and eschews traditional form in favour of calm and contemplative qualities, including many of those I used to describe *Für Alina*. Eno suggested that «ambient music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting».<sup>30</sup> Irissari's cover is an excellent example of a music that is both ignorable and interesting.

At the start of Irissari's track the low Bs are struck with force and the ambient sound generated from it becomes a background low rumble. Irissari's delicate orchestration is laced with vague extraneous sounds that gently nudge the brain without distracting it from the underlying repetition of the exemplar. He keeps the original key and pitches (sometimes with octave modification) and instrument (though it may be a digital piano). The form of the cover is essentially six occurrences of the piece starting with a slightly modified performance of the original.

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29. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bi3JYg9Uhw>> [20 November 2023].

30. Liner notes from the initial American release of Brian Eno's *Music for Airports / Ambient 1*, PVC 7908 (AMB 001) (LP), 1978.

The five subsequent repetitions are characterised by the addition of electronic voices and extraneous noises, and there is a consistent quiet bass which moves up and down by step from B to G. The following description outlines the form and content of the piece:

SECTION	TIMING	DESCRIPTION
1	0:00	once through original (modified), introduction of additional sounds (clicks and taps)
2	2:45	piano repeats the first section, synth starts, clicks continue, the swirling intensity of accompaniment grows, periodic octave displacement
3	5:30	octave displacement, quicker, unpitched rumble intensifies
4	7:15	rumble fades in and out, countermelody is more apparent
5	9:02	lh down octave then back
6	11:10	final repeat, background fades to just piano which fades to silence

There are several techniques here that make this version successful: the way it establishes its own sound world which grows logically out of the original, the careful way the extraneous noises are added so as to enhance not annoy, the way it negotiates a comparatively long timeframe while promoting an active or at least semi-active listening mode, and the general sensitivity to the introspective nature of the original. In many of the longer piano solo covers the listener ends up simply counting repetitions of the piece. Irissari is adept at disguising this so the whole piece is seamless and has more of the timeless qualities of the original.

Many performers are not creating these covers for financial or personal gain, but from the desire to create, the desire to share, and the desire to be immersed in a transformative soundscape. A person from the Netherlands using the name Coversart has a YouTube channel with hundreds of covers of works by composers such as Philip Glass, Michael Nyman, and Erik Satie.<sup>31</sup> Coversart has clearly engaged extensively with the *Für Alina* and has released three notable versions: *Für Alina* (12:35), *Escaping Alina* (24:32), and *In the Pursuit of Alina* (23:50). In addition, another cover (also titled *Für Alina*) posted to YouTube includes an interesting explanation of their engagement with the original:

I made this recording as an experiment: at the end of several long working days, after midnight, being extremely tired, I would turn off the lights in the studio, press the record button, and then try to play *Für Alina* for the longest time possible without stopping, without losing control. This version is the shortest

31. <<https://www.youtube.com/@coversart/about>> [23 April 2023]. As of April 23, 2023, Coversart has had 16,208,857 views to their page.

one — 24 minutes, and it is in this performance that it is most simple to trace the ongoing evolution of time and space.<sup>32</sup>

The cover titled *Escaping Alina* is representative of Coversart's style and aesthetic. It is essentially a light and airy ambient instrumental. There is very little surface movement but gradual changes over an expansive timescale. The effect is similar to the glacial stillness and perpetual movement of the version by Saunders described below. Coverstart often intensifies dynamics which drop away suddenly to reveal a new dyad in the original, sometimes with extraneous pitches which shift to the transparent and calming consonance of the original. Coversart exploits the tension and relaxation inherent in the tintinnabuli technique (which is caused by the various degrees of consonance and dissonance between the two tintinnabuli voices), but on a much larger scale and with a seamless legato. The original is distinctly audible throughout and there is both a sense of movement and stasis which is profoundly satisfying. This version has a skilfully negotiated ending which aurally re-establishes the low Bs before a carefully spun fade to silence.

These covers are highly original and personal essays which attempt a hermetic of the original in aural rather than written form. Many of them present an embodiment of the music to a high degree of individuation. There is often no intentionality to aspects of form and meaning just an enacted interpretation which confirms Steiner's suggestion that «in respect of meaning and of valuation in the arts, our master intelligencers are the performers».<sup>33</sup>

## Digital Manipulation

The versions by Coversart and Irisarri use forms of digital manipulation to enhance acoustic instruments but in comparatively conservative and traditional ways. There are, however, several interesting examples with more daring and substantial digital manipulation.

The first example, by a YouTuber named "euwbah", is what they describe as «an improvisation based on the theme, form, and story of *Für Alina*». The music is performed using a cross platform microtonal seaboard patcher, which is a computer program that allows the use of a keyboard to generate microtonal pitches. The tuning system provides 31 equal divisions of the octave, with pitch A<sub>4</sub> at the standard 440Hz; however, the piece is transposed to C-minor as the seaboard patcher cannot generate enough pitches to cover the original key. The video also includes a 5D 11-limit harmonic lattice visualiser so you can see pitches and their spatial relationship to one another as well as euwbah's hands on the keyboard.

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32. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgB5KqQFSD4>> [20 November 2023].

33. George Steiner, *Real Presences*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1991, p. 9.

Although many will prefer to listen without visuals, here the screen displays the sonic architecture in ways that are both beautiful and revealing.

There are, of course, technical difficulties playing a keyboard set up for 31 sounds and in the video you can see euwbah thinking their next strategies. The microtonal sound world works well with the choice of piece since its sparseness is optimal for noticing the modified pitches and it is easy to adjust to the detailed tuning. Euwbah's cover lasts almost 44 minutes and, while there are issues with both its length and content, it is extraordinary for its enterprise, and it will be interesting to see if others will take up the microtonal approach to cover this or other works by Pärt.

### *Spiegel im Spiegel*

Another popular piece used for cover versions is *Spiegel im Spiegel* which was originally scored for violin and piano. The “rules of the game” for the piece are simple: a melodic line (played by a solo instrument) takes  $A_4$  as its pitch centre and simply moves down or up to this pitch, which becomes the mirror reflecting the ascending and descending lines (see Ex. 2).

The image shows a musical score for the first six measures of 'Spiegel im Spiegel' by Arvo Pärt. It is arranged for Violino (Violin) and Pianoforte (Piano). The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} \approx 100$ . The key signature is one flat (B-flat major). The time signature is 4/4. The Violino part consists of a single melodic line that starts on a whole note G4, moves up to a whole note A4, then down to a whole note Bb4, then up to a whole note G4, and finally rests on a whole note A4. The Pianoforte accompaniment is in three registers: the bass line plays sustained low Fs (F2) in the first and sixth measures; the right hand plays an arpeggiated figure of quarter notes in the middle register (G4, A4, Bb4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4) in measures 1-6; and a super high T-voice (E6) is played in the first measure.

Ex. 2. Arvo Pärt, *Spiegel im Spiegel*, bb. 1–6.

Reproduced by kind permission of Universal Edition AG, Wien.

The lines are additive: first G up to A, then  $B^b$  down to A, then F–G–A, and so on, until nine pitches are used, before the piece comes to rest on the mirror  $A_4$  pitch. The accompaniment is in F-major (one of only a few major key tintinnabuli works), and is in three distinct registers: the bass plays only sustained low Fs (the fundamental for the tonality), while an arpeggiated figure in quarter-notes, largely in the register above middle C, is the equivalent of the T-voice. The piano version also plays a super high T-voice at slow speed and spread out over a long time frame. Recordings of the original work range from eight to twelve minutes.

The popularity of *Spiegel* demonstrates one of the earliest types of adaptation of Pärt's works, that of reorchestration. There are two features driving the need for arrangements: first, the desire to perform Pärt's music, to embody it, and to participate in its aural creation. The second is the desire to bring this music to audiences, to share the experience through programming and performance. These complimentary desires mean that certain pieces exist in multiple versions scored for different instruments. Some of these have been arranged by Pärt himself, however, several reorchestrations are by people other than Pärt, which he has acknowledged, and which are published as authentic by Universal Edition, his principal publisher.<sup>34</sup> The reason these reorchestrations have the imprimatur of the composer is because Pärt has stated that the essence of his music is not contained in the timbre but the pitches.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the medium may change, but the message remains the same. Pärt has been explicit about this, noting:

For me, the highest value of music is outside its color. Special instrumental timbre is part of the music, yet it's not a primary quality. That would be my capitulation to the secret of music. Music has to exist by itself . . . two, three notes. The secret must be there, independent of any instrument. Music must derive from inside, and I have deliberately tried to write such music that can be played on a variety of instruments.<sup>36</sup>

So, although the original version of *Spiegel* was for violin and piano, there are currently twelve authorised and published version, including transcriptions for alto flute or for double bass as the solo instrument. This reorchestration extends to other works by Pärt which have a similar redemptive quality and which people want to perform. The Universal Edition website currently lists sixteen arrangements of *Fratres*, eight of *Da pacem Domine* [Give peace, O Lord, 2004], seven of *Summa* [Total, 1977], and five of *Pari intervallo*.<sup>37</sup>

Previously, arrangements and transcriptions were composed to honour the original (both composer and piece), to make practical or update a piece (Mozart's reorchestration of Handel's *Messiah*, for example), or to demonstrate virtuosity and compositional technique (such as Liszt's transcriptions of Italian opera arias).

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34. For example, there are versions of *Fratres* arranged by Beat Briner, Manuel Barrueco, Dietmar Schwalke, Lars Anders Tomter, Johannes Stert, Vambola Krigul, Peter Thalheimer in the Universal Edition catalogue, as well as nine versions by Pärt himself; <<https://www.universaledition.com/arvo-part-534/works>> [20 November 2023].

35. Conductor Andreas Peer Kähler has also noted that «As with timbre, tempo is not a crucial music parameter according to Pärt»; Andreas Peer Kähler, *Radiating from Silence: The Works of Arvo Pärt Seen through a Musician's Eyes*, in Shenton, *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, p. 196.

36. Elste, *An interview*, p. 339.

37. <<https://www.universaledition.com/arvo-part-534/works>> [20 November 2023].

Often these are improvements, and many arrangements are more frequently performed than the originals. The Tango in D from *España* by Isaac Albeniz, for example, is much more popular in guitar arrangements by John Williams and others and in the piano version by Leopold Godowsky than it is in its original form. It is possible that this will happen to Pärt and his derived works too.

Reorchestration of Pärt's originals is a minor category, and they cannot perhaps be considered sibling works, especially given Pärt's statement about timbre. They do, however, bring Pärt's sonic aesthetic to increasingly larger audiences in forms akin to the original.

## Pastiche

Given that the tintinnabuli technique is essentially simple it is perhaps surprising that it has not been adopted by other composers. There are a few examples, but unlike say serialism, which became something to master and then to utilise or discard, in large part because of the way Pärt's early tintinnabuli works have been mainstreamed, the technique is currently not widespread.<sup>38</sup> It has, however, been used as pastiche, which imitates an original for a specific effect, as seen in the following example.

*Spiegel im Spiegel* has been adopted as the soundtrack for numerous professional and personal videos to establish mood and enhance empathy.<sup>39</sup> It was effectively used for the official teaser trailer for the 2013 Oscar-winning movie *Gravity*.<sup>40</sup> Over spectacular shots of the earth from space, *Spiegel* lent that familiar calmness and engaged detachment that has become a trope with use of Pärt's music. A few months after the movie was released, the recurring couch gag sequence in the opening titles of *The Simpsons* featured an homage to the movie in which the weightless family struggle to make it on to the couch.<sup>41</sup> The parody references the movie trailer through use of a pastiche version of *Spiegel* composed by the in-house composer for *The Simpson*, Alf Clausen.<sup>42</sup> Clausen adopted the tempo, accompanying figure, and long solo line in his version which makes no attempt to disguise

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38. Some composers who have utilised the style include Leopold Brauneiss, who composed a setting of Psalm 131 for organ and baritone in 2000; and Andrián Pertout, whose *Angustam Amice* for SATB choir and string orchestra was composed to celebrate Pärt's 80th birthday.

39. Feature films that feature *Spiegel* prominently include Mike Nicolas, *Wit*, Avenue Pictures Production, 2001; Gus van Sant, *Gerry*, THINKFilm, 2002; Paolo Sorrentino, *This Must Be the Place*, Lucky Red *et al.*, 2011.

40. Alfonso Cuarón, *Gravity*, Warner Brothers, 2013.

41. Michael Polcino, *Yolo*, *The Simpsons*, episode 534, original air date: 10 November 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvR1SYynJGo>> [20 November 2023].

42. <[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2967632/fullcredits/?ref\\_=tt\\_cl\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2967632/fullcredits/?ref_=tt_cl_sm)> [20 November 2023].

the original. Here the pastiche is intended as parody, however, I suggest that in the film world Pärt's music has become for many the equivalent of an Instagram filter, changing the emotional temperature, contrast, and saturation of many videos and films, especially those produced at the amateur level.

### *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*

My final example uses Pärt's *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* which was composed in 1977. Scored for string orchestra and a bell, it combines a mensuration canon with tintinnabuli techniques. After the bell chimes a solemn introduction, the canon starts in the first violins and moves its way downward through the string instruments, ending when the double basses have finished their iteration of the theme. Each string part is divided into two parts (except the viola which plays a single M-voice throughout) with the upper one being the M-voice and the lower the T-voice (see Ex. 3).

The image shows a musical score for Arvo Pärt's *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, measures 7-11. The score is arranged in five staves: Camp (bell), Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. (double bass). The Camp part is marked with a fermata and a half note. The Vln. I part starts with a fermata, then plays a series of notes with 'div.' and 'sim.' markings. The Vln. II part starts with a fermata, then plays a series of notes with 'div.' and 'pp' markings. The Vla. part starts with a fermata, then plays a series of notes with 'p' markings. The Vc. part starts with a fermata, then plays a series of notes with 'div.' and 'mp' markings.

Ex. 3. Arvo Pärt, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, bb. 7–11.  
Reproduced by kind permission of Universal Edition AG, Wien.

The sibling work is a wholesale and simple manipulation by Kenny Saunders of a live recording from the 2010 British Proms which he posted to YouTube.<sup>43</sup> Saunders himself did nothing except select the piece and the recording which he then put through an open-source computer program called Paul's Extreme Sound Stretch which «allows you to time-stretch an audio file with the intent of

43. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcMLEB7t4gw>> [20 November 2023]. The original recording is here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82-xbhfnR2g&t=os>> [20 November 2023].

rendering any sound into relaxing ambient music». <sup>44</sup> What the program does is produce high-quality extreme sound stretching without any loss to pitches. The result is a version of *Cantus* that is almost 700% slower than the original making a piece that lasts 42:01 from an original recording that lasts only 6:10. <sup>45</sup>

Given that the essential point of these slow versions is for their slightly trippy meditative qualities Saunders choice of *Cantus* is extremely good. <sup>46</sup> The canon is in a single key throughout which keeps a stable tonal framework, yet the continuous downward trajectory of the lines and the occasional bell chime (which seems quite random in the slow version) all contribute to an essentially timeless experience. The aural effect of this extreme prolongation of every sound event is extraordinary. The cumulative addition of pitches presents a cloud cluster of sounds that shimmer with the slow vibrato of the strings and the resonance of the bell. It presents a ghost dimension to the sound so that it feels as though one can move around in the sonic architecture and examine each sound event from a unique perspective. The chord clusters ebb and flow in elongated periods of tension and relaxation, which eliminates any chronological sense of time. The extended duration of the play between consonance and dissonance also means that by the time the canon has played out and the basses arrive on the final A this V-I cadence is flooded with a sense of calm and a sense of ending. It is a profound moment that is simple but extraordinarily effective.

### Concluding remarks

It is evident from the comments on sites like YouTube as well as the proliferation of works derived from Pärt, that there is a large and appreciative audience for both the originals and the derived works. For example, Veen's recording has comments on YouTube that include describing the music as «a dialogue with souls, in pearls of silence», and «I am an atheist but the music of Arvo Pärt speaks to me in a way that nothing else does». For Irissari's version someone wrote «I feel myself compelled to sojourn to the beautiful heart aching wonder, that is this».

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44. <[https://www.majorgeeks.com/files/details/pauls\\_extreme\\_sound\\_stretch.html](https://www.majorgeeks.com/files/details/pauls_extreme_sound_stretch.html)> [20 November 2023].

45. The YouTube video claims the piece is slowed by 800% which is a slight exaggeration based on the timing of both recordings which amounts to a 688.68852% change.

46. *Cantus* is not the only recording to have been subject to this particular digital manipulation. YouTube also has extremely slow versions of pieces by Radiohead, Justin Bieber, Pink Floyd, and Aphex Twin alongside the first movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight" sonata and the Spongebob Squarepants theme. Other works by Pärt have also been processed by the Sound stretch program. A YouTuber named Ghost Cathedrals has an «ambient rework» of *Da pacem Domine* using the recording from *Arvo Pärt: In Principio*, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR8hn9pCfcY>> [20 November 2023].

It is also evident that the many of the derived works are as popular as some of Pärt's originals. The *Alina* album has been out for nearly twenty-five years, and it has been a commercial success. The first of Malter's improvisations has had almost 11 million plays on Spotify alone. The more recent work by Veen (2014) is similarly popular. The first track on his album has had nearly 1.3 million Spotify plays. Both are impressive figures for covers of classical music.

These examples show some of the extent to which Pärt has been the progenitor of other works. The most interesting of these are the cover versions that are not restricted by the original but use them only as the starting point for exploration and elaboration. It is interesting to note how many of the covers are not contained in scores but are realised in performances and, especially, in recordings. This means that they are engendered by a single act of creation and are closely and personally related to the performer/creator of the new work and not intended to be re-created by other people. This marks an important inflection point in contemporary music which elevates the role of the performer. As musicologist Daniel Leech-Wilkinson asserts, «the performer is the source of all specific musical meaning».<sup>47</sup> Leech-Wilkinson acknowledges that the compositional text is important but notes that it is «what the performer does with it that shapes our responses, indeed that allows us to have responses at all».<sup>48</sup> This compliments Pärt's own notion that «music is simply a bridge between us, and what the interpreter does is very beautiful».

The interpretation of Pärt's originals in the various derived works are providing important repertoire for contemporary needs. Philosopher George Steiner, acknowledging our increasing secularisation, suggested that: «The lapse from [religious] ceremony and ritual in much of public and private behavior has left a vacuum. At the same time, there is a thirst for magical and “transrational” forms. The capacity of organised religion to satisfy this thirst diminishes».<sup>49</sup> Some of Pärt's music is suitable for liturgical use, much is music for the concert hall, but mainly this is music for private consumption, for listening through headphones, and on demand. It satisfies the thirst left by the vacuum of religious ritual and invites its own rituals which are performance, listening, meditation, and transformation. What these early tintinnabuli originals and many of the cover versions present is music that is fully accessible. It doesn't require verbal analysis or interpretation, it

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47. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, CHARM (Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music), London 2009, *Preface*, paragraph 3, <<http://charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/intro.html>> [20 November 2023].

48. *Ibid.*

49. George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture*, Yale University Press, New Haven (CT) 1971, p. 121.

just is. We can apply acute critical and analytical pressure to this music, yet it does not alter its inherent empathetic value.

Steiner also suggests that «the matter of music is central to that of the meanings of humans, of our access to or abstention from metaphysical experience».<sup>50</sup> The ongoing rejection of the authority of organised religion and the secularisation of society does not preclude humans from engaging with the metaphysical, and Pärt's music and the responses to it described here do seem to provide original and profound ways to access the personal divine for many people both actively and passively. Pärt as composer and as progenitor has created a body of music which, as Steiner suggests, forms part of «a phenomenon without which, for innumerable men and women, this plagued earth and our transit on it would probably be unbearable».<sup>51</sup>

#### Abstract

Il compositore estone Arvo Pärt (nato nel 1935) ha sviluppato negli anni Settanta una nuova tecnica compositiva dotata di particolare fascino e mistero, denominata *tintinnabuli*. La sua musica è statica ed estatica, elegantemente semplice e ingannevolmente complessa, visionaria e sorprendente, ed è apprezzata da un pubblico ampio e diversificato. Al di là delle sue opere originali, Pärt è anche il progenitore di una serie di opere "sorelle" che hanno contribuito ad amplificare ulteriormente il suo fascino. In questo saggio vengono analizzate alcune modalità di utilizzo della musica di Pärt come fonte di ispirazione, da parte di altri compositori e performer. In particolare, si ipotizza che i creatori delle opere derivate abbiano estratto dalla musica di Pärt alcuni elementi essenziali che risuonano in un orizzonte di spiritualità secolare. Analizzando esempi di campionamenti, arrangiamenti, *pastiche*, influenze dirette e indirette, improvvisazione e manipolazione digitale, si mette in luce la riuscita e il valore intrinseco di queste opere "sorelle" che, oltre a rappresentare un tributo empatico nei confronti dell'originale, ci restituiscono una vasta gamma di declinazioni espressive personali. Le opere "sorelle" sono facilmente accessibili e vengono utilizzate in rituali secolari di performance, meditazione, ascolto e trasformazione. Si tratta di lavori molto originali e personali che intraprendono un'esplorazione ermeneutica dell'originale in forma acustica, spesso creando nuovi mondi sonori e raffinando l'essenza del mistero legato alla tecnica del *tintinnabuli*.

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50. Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 6 (language updated from the then normative masculine forms).

51. George Steiner, *Errata: An Examined Life*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1997, p. 65.