

Characteristics of the Compositional Process in Arvo Pärt's *Tintinnabuli* Technique

Leopold Brauneiss

Abstract

Many of Pärt's compositions in *tintinnabuli* technique are based on structural ideas which manifest themselves in a characteristic specification of common rules, very often in connection with a given text. As these rules remain valid for the whole or part of a composition, it follows that no details arising from them can be altered. Thus, the first step of the compositional process is to find a proper set of rules, very often in accordance with the formal structure of a given text, that guarantees satisfactory results at every moment. As the sketches for the *Te Deum* exemplarily reveal, this means that Pärt tries out different sets of rules and abandons them immediately if they are not suitable. Another peculiarity is that the compositional process does not end with the first performance but is a work in progress leading to many revisions in order to find the perfectly sounding formulation of the basic structural ideas.

I
Among compositions that adhere to the traditional concept of the musical "work", we can distinguish between those that make use of minimal advanced planning, entrusting themselves to the flow of spontaneous ideas, and those in which musical details result from a network of interrelated ideas stemming from an overall plan drawn up in advance. Generally speaking, in atonal compositions of the 20th century – typically in Anton Webern's late works – such individually shaped plans replace tonality and traditional form models as a "skeleton" of the musical details. Behind such compositions lies the general ideal that every note is the result of the application of a system of rules. No note is random or superfluous, each is of equal value, and, in Pärt's words, has been equally loved.¹ In Pärt's compositions in which the *tintinnabuli* technique is applied in its most characteristic form – and these comments must restrict themselves to such works – Pärt is indeed an extreme representative of the systematic approach. However, he no longer uses it as a substitution for the "structural functions of harmony" – to quote a book title by Arnold Schoenberg (1948; see Schoenberg 1989) – as Pärt himself did in his earlier serial compositions, but instead applies the technique to the "neutral" basic tonal elements of scale and triad. In his *tintinnabuli* compositions based

on a text, irrespective of whether the text is actually sung or merely used to determine the progression of instrumental lines, this systematic compositional method is enriched by its correlation of musical and textual structure. Pärt's strict musical structures have been analysed in various publications. Thomas Robinson offers a systematic analysis of such structures in his contribution to the Cambridge Companion (Robinson 2012). Christopher May discusses selected compositions in regard to new and old categories of music (May 2016). Andrew Shenton concentrates on Pärt's choral and organ music (Shenton 2018), while Toomas Siitan draws special attention to the manifold significance of texts for Pärt and his music (Siitan 2014). In his latest publication, Kevin C. Karnes is the first to venture a closer look at the musical diaries or sketchbooks of the first *tintinnabuli* years in order to clarify – as a chapter heading states – "when things happened, and what they were" (Karnes 2021: 62–65). What is still lacking in the literature is a more traditional approach to an understanding of Pärt's specific way of "thinking in music" through an in-depth study of the sketches themselves. This will hopefully not only lead to a better understanding of the act of composing but also to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic significance of the *tintinnabuli* style.

¹ Compare Pärt's frequently related anecdote: when asked how music should be written, a street sweeper replies: "Das ist aber eine Frage. Man muss wahrscheinlich jeden Ton lieben." (Schorlemmer 2002: 246)

II

Pärt once flippantly remarked that it is the words of the text that write his music – and not, one might add, the composer himself. The comment implies that words are not personally interpreted by the composer but should be understood as linguistic shapes that act in the sense of the Greek *logos*, themselves determining the course of the composition. In this sense Pärt's comment outlines an artistic credo, indeed a philosophy. Analogous to the creation of the world through the divine *logos*, the musical creation arises through the transformation of the contours of individual words, sequences of words and sentences into musical shapes and formal procedures. As sacred texts, they embody the divine *logos*: the circle is complete and the hubris of a composer creating his own artistic religion is replaced by a humble respect for the text and its formative power. More concretely, Pärt's comment refers to a systematic method of composition originating from rules that determine how the original parameters of the text are transformed into music. What does this mean for the compositional process? Particularly in longer works based on a text, the compositional process thus begins with an analysis of the linguistic structure of the text itself. The text of the *Te Deum* with Pärt's hand-written addenda² from 1984 shows us the various ways in which textual parameters are important to the composer (see Figure 1).

Pärt notes the number of syllables in each word to the left of each line of text: one for the single syllable *Te*, two for the two syllables of *Deum* and so on. In the text itself Pärt marks the accented syllables. Both aspects are important at the "micro" level of individual word-shapes. The basic principle of the translation of words into music dictates that in a strictly syllabic setting, the number of steps that each word-setting diverges from the central tone is equal to the number of syllables in that word. The central tone may stand at the beginning or the end of the word. For example, the word *lau-da-mus* can take any of the four forms in relation to the note D shown in Ex. 1.

This static overview of the number of polysyllabic words makes it possible to gauge

how varied the music will become. In the case of a sequence of many monosyllabic words the music stands still, as it were. This a priori assessment is important, since with the *tintinnabuli* composition technique, as with any system-oriented composition method, surface details can only be corrected in exceptional circumstances. With musically unsatisfactory results it is only possible to alter the entire system of rules that, as in serial composition technique, are pre-determined and, as it were, automatically articulated.

Pärt's other handwritten notes refer to the punctuation of the text. The total of 17 framed sections, including the added *Amen*, primarily result from sentences finishing with a full stop, which Pärt frames with a rhombus in the text. The commas are marked in red originally, though, as we shall see later, they only become formally relevant by ending a section when they coincide with the end of the line – and likewise the line endings only become musically relevant when the line closes with a punctuation mark. The sections 7, starting with *Tu rex gloriae*, 9, starting with *Tu ad dexteram*, 12, starting with *Salvum fac*, and 15, starting with *Miserere nostri*, conflate two or three short sentences or invocations. An exegesis of the resulting formal musical structure is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that Pärt devised this structure in the form of a graphic representation (Figure 2).³ Such graphics illustrate the interrelationship between sound and picture, typical of Pärt's compositional method.

As a visual template, the graphic representation acts both as a source of inspiration for the development of the music and as a concise way of controlling the musical architecture. The 17 sections are divided into subsections when there are additional punctuation marks within the sections. All subsections (or the whole section when it is not divided into subsections) are sung once as free-flowing unison melodies reminiscent of Gregorian chant and indicated by wavy lines. After final subsections – or, if there is no subsection, then at the end of the single section – follows a closing four-part chorale in a major key that appears as a black rectangle – the text of this last section is thus set twice to music in different

² Arvo Pärt Centre (Arvo Pärdi Keskus), APK 2-3.72.

³ APK 2-1.89, p. 42, *Te Deum* 4, 1984.

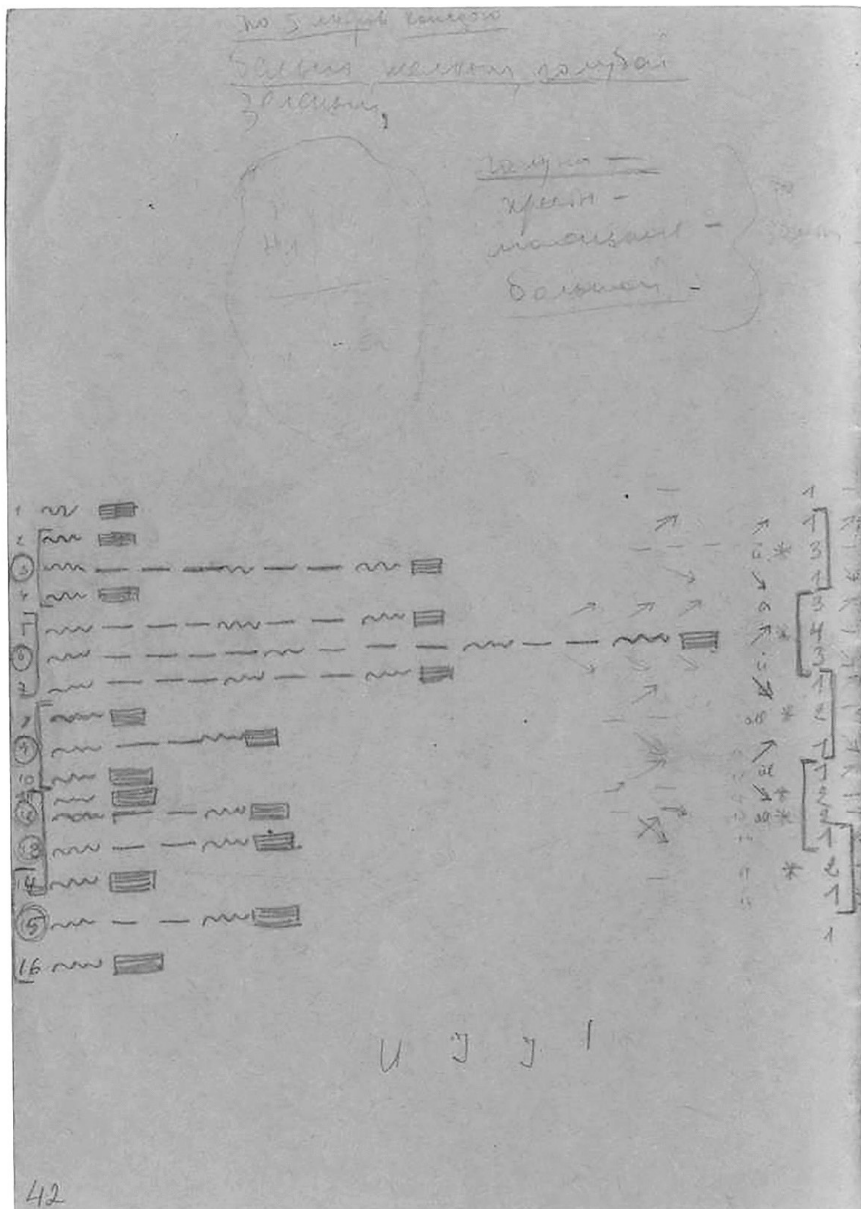
Figure 1. Te Deum: Printed text with Pärt's handwritten remarks (APK 2-3.72).

123 134	Te deum laudamus, te dominum confitemur.	M
132 224	Te aeternum patrem omnis terra veneratur.	N
223 2214	Tibi omnes angeli, tibi caeli et universae potestates,	
2313523	Tibi Cherubim et Seraphim incessabili voce proclamant:	M
22232	Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, dominus deus Sabaoth.	M
2121243	Pleni sunt caeli et terra majestatis gloriae tuae.	N
1352	Te gloriosus apostolorum chorus,	
1443	Te prophetarum laudabilis numerus,	S
13424	Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus.	
1123244	Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur ecclesia,	
234	Patrem immensae majestatis;	N
422133	Venerandum tuum verum et unicum filium;	
2243	Sanctum quoque paraclitum spiritum.	
1132	Tu rex gloriae, Christe.	M
12413	Tu patris sempiternus es filius.	
1144314	Tu, ad liberandum suscepturus hominem, non horruisti	
33	virginis uterum.	
1324542	Tu, devicto mortis aculeo, aperuisti credentibus regna	N
3	caelorum.	
1132213	Tu ad dexteram dei sedes in gloria patris.	M
2323	Judex crederis esse venturus.	M
12323314	Te ergo quaesumus tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso	N
34	sanguine redemisti.	
31122134	Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari.	M
113231352	Salvum fac populum tuum, domine, et benedic hereditati	N
12213221	tuae.	
12213221	Et rege eos, et extolle illos usque in aeternum.	
13251	Per singulos dies benedicimus te;	
132213113	Et laudamus nomen tuum in saeculum et in saeculum	S
3	saeculi.	
33222314	Dignare, domine, die isto sine peccato nos custodire.	N
42342	Miserere nostri, domine, miserere nostri.	M
26432	Fiat misericordia tua, domine, super nos, quemadmodum	
4	speravimus in te.	
11,3	In te, domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum.	N
31	AMEN.	M

Example 1. Possible melodic settings of a trisyllabic word.



Figure 2. *Te Deum*: graphic sketch of the formal structure (APK 2-1.89).



ways. The preceding subsections are answered with instrumental settings of the previous vocally exposed lines – if there are three subsections as in section 3, this vocal “cantus firmus” is played three times by instruments at the first of three subsections and twice at the second, and with four subsections correspondingly four times at the first subsection and so on (see the horizontal strokes in the graphic representation).

III

It is evident from the above that the basis of each composition to a text is a word-derived melodic line with no specification of rhythm, tempo, or timbre. This “naked” melodic line is on the one hand the direct descendant of the single melodic lines that Pärt notated in his musical diaries before the conception of the *tintinnabuli* style. On the other hand one might compare the process to the devising of a twelve-note row in which rhythm and polyphonic elaboration are similarly finalised at a later stage of composition.

In the first of the sketch books for the *Te Deum*⁴ Pärt has written individual lines of text above the stave and tried out various melodic lines based on different musical rules (Figure 3).

In the line beginning with *Tibi omnes* written above the text Pärt was evidently aiming to generate a flexible melodic ductus for the chant-like melody, in which the central tone does not change freely but according to specific rules. Thus, in the first line, descending and ascending scale segments consistently alternate and the monosyllabic word *et* is also integrated into this regular pattern as an ascending movement indicated by the arrow pointing upwards. After every word with a descending scalic movement the following word-shape starts a second higher, and after every ascending movement it begins a second lower. This constant change of direction continues in the line below. However, the starting note of the first syllable of every word is here always the same as the last note of the preceding word. This time the monosyllabic word is not included and the direction changes on the last two words. The next four lines are

more traditional: the central tone is always E. As represented in a simplified manner by the symbols to the right of the stave, in the fourth line there is an up and down movement above the central tone resulting from the constant alternation between a scale ascending from the central tone and a scale descending to the central tone – again the monosyllabic word is not included. The line immediately below is an inversion resulting in an arch movement below the central tone. Lines 3 and 6 are mirrored about a horizontal axis, whereby the movement always proceeds from the central tone E'. The constant change of direction begins in the third line with the descending form, and in the sixth with the ascending form (Figure 4).

In the next sketch⁵ to be discussed, the first half of stave 3 is very much the same as the printed version, with its ascending motion across an octave, the technical correlative being the rule that the central tone should leap from note to note of a “tonic” *tintinnabuli* triad – here still the A minor triad and not the D minor triad of the printed version. The first word ascends from the root note A, the next pair of words descends and ascends from the fifth E', the final pair of words after the monosyllabic *et* (already on A') ascends and descends again from the root note an octave higher (A'). Both the addition of “white” note-heads indicating a prolongation, as in the second word, and the inserted two-note melisma, such as in the third word, set the accented syllables in relief and further differentiate the melody.

When transposed to D minor, the range of the male chorus begins with the third of the tonic D minor *tintinnabuli* triad and is further extended so that only the monosyllabic word *et* receives the note F of the triad. The final notes before the punctuation marks are lengthened and a caesura is added by Pärt before the last word *potestates*, as well as the first note of the two-note melisma on this word (Ex. 2).

Even when the melodic lines are more freely shaped than for instance in the strictly structured *Passio*, they still derive from the four possible ways in which scalic movement and central tone may be related, as illustrated by the word *laudamus*

⁴ APK 2-1.86, p. 10, *Te Deum* 1, 1984.

⁵ APK 2-1.87, p. 10, *Te Deum* 2, 1984.

Figure 3. Te Deum: Different melodic settings of the sentence Tibi omnes ... (APK 2-1.86).

2 2 3 2 2 1 4 4
Tibi omnes angeli, tibi caeli et universae potestates

→ → → → → → → →

2 korv. tut. f. a. u. e.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

10

10

confitemur
confite mur.
confite mur

10

Figure 4. Further version of the sentence *Tibi omnes ...* (APK 2-1.87).

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a vocal piece. It is divided into three main sections: A, B, and C. Section A contains two lines of music with lyrics: "Te deum laudamus, te dominum confitemur Te orbis universi totius terra generatur" and "Tibi omnes angeli, tibi caeli et universae potestates, Tibi constanti et benigni incessabili voce proclamant:". Section B consists of three staves of music. Section C consists of three staves of music with various annotations and markings. The score includes notes, rests, and other musical symbols characteristic of Pärt's style.

A 1 Te deum laudamus, te dominum confitemur Te orbis universi totius terra generatur
 2
 3 Tibi omnes angeli, tibi caeli et universae potestates, Tibi constanti et benigni incessabili voce proclamant:
 4

B 1 2
 3

C 1 2 3
 A₁ B₁ C₁
 A₂ B₂ C₂

10

Example 2. Final and printed version of sentence *Tibi omnes ...*

starting with third of D Minor triad

only monosyllabic word "et" on note f

Ti - bi o - mnes An - ge - li, ti - bi cae - li, et u - ni - ver - sae Po - tes - ta - tes.

at the start. Moreover, it becomes apparent that differentiations such as the changing of the central tone are again the result of simple rules.

IV

Whereas in the corresponding sections of the *Te Deum* the music restricts itself to a highly-profiled bordun-accompanied monody, polyphony in *tintinnabuli* style results from the combination of various specific processes. Triadic voices, the so-called *tintinnabuli* voices, are set in a particular relation to the melodic voices, for instance by adding the nearest note of the triad above and below. The melodic line may also be multiplied in parallel or contrary motion. As different assemblies of scale segments for each word result in various horizontal melodic lines in relation to the central tones, different rules concerning the addition of voices result in different vertical combinations. Again, it is a question of finding the suitable set of rules that, when applied to the given melody, will lead to satisfactorily sounding results. An example of how Pärt tried out different textures is found in the original version of the *Passio*. There is a complete manuscript of the work from his time in Tallinn before his emigration in a sketch book dated 1–5 March 1977,⁶ with the Turba passage beginning with the words *Noli scribere Rex Judeaorum* on page 129. Various other polyphonic versions of the four-part texture are found in another sketch book⁷ written around the same time, dated 12 February – 14 March 77, on pages 100 (Figure 5) and 101 (Figure 6), from 3 March.

In all versions, the basic text-derived melodic line is doubled through inversion at the octave. In the first version on page 100 the alto part is highlighted in green, while the inversion in the bass and the triadic voices are written in red. In all other versions these two voices remain the same. In the last two systems on page 101 (marked with a 2 and a 3 respectively) they are transposed so that all word shapes do not start with the A, root of the *tintinnabuli* A minor triad, but with the fifth, E, or the third, C. The differences are the result of the various positions of the two other triadic (*tintinnabuli*) voices: In the first version both tenor and soprano refer to the bass and perhaps for this reason are all written in the same colour (see Figure 5 page 100). The tenor completes the note of the A minor triad that is nearest but one above the melodic line in the bass, the soprano the nearest above – albeit displaced an octave above. Pärt notates a further version on the last staff system. Here the melodic voices in contrary motion are written in blue and the *tintinnabuli* voices in red. The tenor part is identical to the first version,⁸ though here notated in the final stave in the bass clef. In this version, however, the *tintinnabuli* voice in the soprano follows the alto and completes the nearest note of the A minor triad above. Presumably because the tenor not only comes to rest above the alto at the last chord in the fourth bar but is also identical to the note of the soprano, Pärt added only a few more notes in the soprano, and discarded this version as he was writing it. On page 101 a version marked "1" appears that Pärt marks with an X in the right-hand margin – presumably denoting

⁶ APK 2-1.20, p. 129.

⁷ APK 2-1.21, pp. 100–101.

⁸ The deviating third note in the fourth bar is most likely not a deliberate deviation from a system, but the result of a simple error.

Figure 5. *Passio*: first settings of the sentence *Noli scribere ...* (APK 2-1.21).

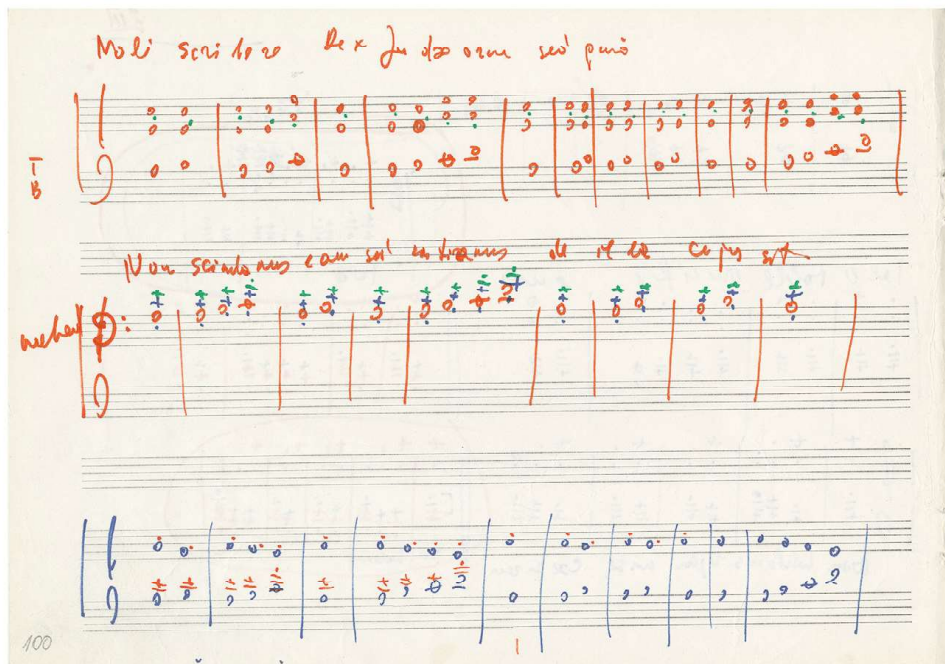
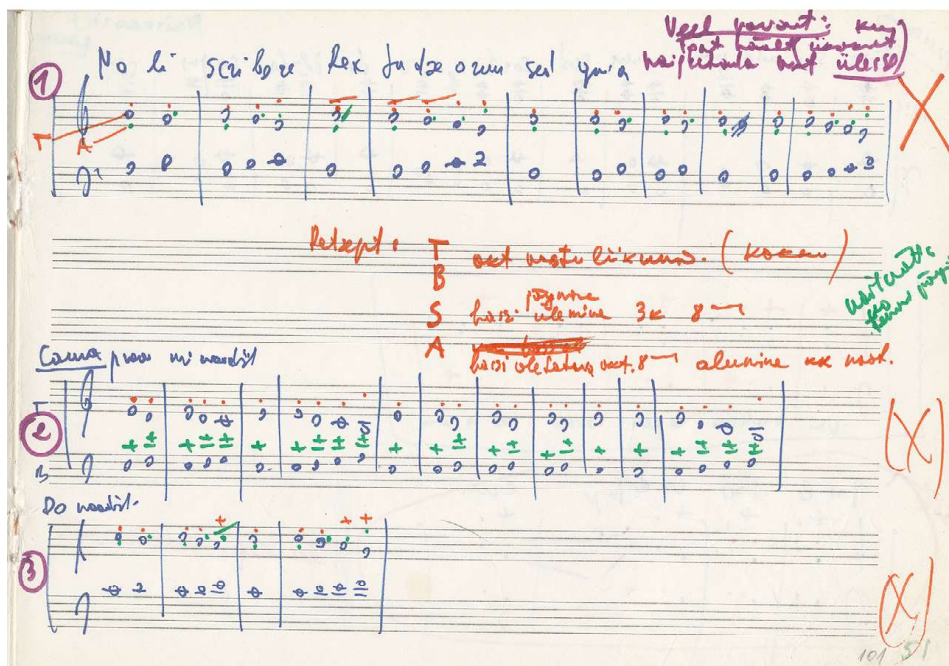


Figure 6. *Passio*: further settings of the sentence *Noli scribere ...* (APK 2-1.21).



that he feels this to be the best version. The voice in red – presumably the last *tintinnabuli* voice to be added – is identical with that of the first version. The second *tintinnabuli* voice in green now adds to the bass melody the nearest lower notes of the triad, transposed up an octave. In the text below Pärt refers to this sort of voice leading as a "recipe". After the indication, valid for all

examples *T / B okt vastu liikumine (kokku)* (tenor and bass in counter movement at the octave, moving together) the *tintinnabuli* voices are described as follows: *S bassi järgmine ülemine 3 k 8*, *A bassi oletatav oktav 8 alumine kk noot* (S next upper triad note of bass octave higher, A lower triad note of bass, imagined an octave higher). As this green part – originally given to the tenor

Figure 7. *Passio*: fair copy of page 5 (APK 2-2.1.228).

– frequently lies above the upper melodic voice and rises to C², the latter must be moved to the tenor – indicated by the letters T and A, added in red. However, this implies that the tenor must begin each word with the exposed A¹. Presumably therefore Pärt transposed the entire structure downwards in the second version, so the melodic voices now begin on the fifth of the *tintinnabuli* triad E or E¹, and all voices end up in a comfortable vocal range. In the final version Pärt experiments with beginning the melodic voices on the third of the *tintinnabuli* triad (C): all four voices are now in so high a range that a realisation with tutti choir seems impossible.

I have analysed this passage in such painstaking detail to point out the methods and problems of composing in the *tintinnabuli* style. As Pärt put it, it is a question of finding a recipe that leads to satisfying musical results, both in the sense of the resultant harmonies as well the choral sound. The latter depends on the range and exact position of the individual voices, both in the immediate moment, and over long stretches of the work. For this, careful thought must be given to these “structural recipes” before writing down the work. With structures more complex than the monodic lines of special melodic profile

in the first example from *Te Deum* and with four-part choral writing from *Passio* an even greater number of variants must be tried out. Therein lies the paradox of the “complexity” of simplicity in *tintinnabuli* compositional technique.

V

A description of the characteristics of the compositional process would be incomplete without pointing out that this process does not end with the first performance, but rather enters a new phase. After their realisation in performance, the results yielded by the set of rules are tested and optimised. In accordance with the method outlined above, the modification of a rule applies to all detailed situations of the work. Thus, for instance, in the *Passio*, the rests and some note values were shortened after the premiere, as the original values had caused the musical flow to falter. Pärt made these amendments directly into the fair copy of the score.⁹ For example, in the original version all notes of the last words before full stops or colons as well as their subsequent instrumental mirroring were multiplied by four to become semibreves. In the correction (Figure 7) the note values of the words themselves are not

⁹ APK 2-2.1.228, p. 7 (originally p. 5).

Figure 8. Sieben Magnificat-Antiphonen: fair copy of page 12 (APK 2-2.3.165).

12

6. O König aller Völker

1 = 12.0
subito = and

S
A
T
B

O Kö-nig aller Völker,
O kö-nig aller Völker

mp

O König aller Völker, ihre Erwartung und
ihre Erwartung und Sehnsucht,
ihre Erwartung und Sehnsucht, Schlußstein der den Bau zusammenhält:
Sehnsucht, Schlußstein, der den Bau zusammenhält:

Schlußstein, der
O komm und er-rette den menschen, den du aus Erde gebildet! O kö-
O komm und errette den Menschen, den du aus Erde

UE 19098

shortened, but in the subsequent instrumental mirroring of the vocal line and in the rest that follows it the values are halved.

On rare occasions such as the sixth of the *Sieben Magnificat-Antiphonen*, an additional voice is added in pencil into the manuscript fair copy of the score used in the premiere (Figure 8).¹⁰ The original alto voice, a *tintinnabuli* voice to the melodic voice in the soprano, now moves to the soprano 2. The sustained note D in the alto part is added to the five-part texture. A melodic voice is sung once in soprano 2 with the nearest note above of the minor triad D in soprano 1, and twice in tenor 2, with the next note but one above of the triad in tenor 1 and the next note but one below in the bass. The sustained note D', dynamically set in relief in *mezzo piano* (*piano in the printed score with other voices then in pianissimo*) mid-range, acts as the backbone of the music, reducing the disparate layers to a common denominator, as it were, filling in the general rests in the other voices that automatically result from the rules and strengthening the forward-moving march character of the music.

VI

As we have seen, the process of composition consists in trying out different rules until the "ideal form" has been found. If the rules are themselves rational, then the ear and personal sensibility decides which will lead to satisfying results, and which are to be discarded. The alterations after the act of composition then continue what

was begun during the initial experimentation with various "recipes": the frequently laborious adjustment of the system of rules to the reality of musical sound. One might argue that the drawing up, testing and evaluation of rules is a laborious and circuitous route, and that instead one could freely invent a satisfying melodic line in the traditional way. However, the fabric of rules behind each musical occurrence, determining that each note be placed exactly as it is and in no other way, is acoustically perceptible and adds to the quality of the musical experience. Moreover, this way of doing things is part of an attitude that has ramifications in religious sentiment, far beyond the field of aesthetics: one must first take a step back, become "nothing" and then, in this attitude of humility, one may receive a gift – in the form of the musical results that the correct combination of simple rules sets in motion. One is reminded of the quote: "First of all, you must make yourself nothing. There must be silence. You must make peace with your powerlessness. And that which is then given is like a gift."¹¹ Seen in this way, the rules are by no means just a technical support to the act of composition. The creative impulse of the composer can be drawn towards innovative combinations of familiar rules. They indicate a trust that, behind the manifold, antagonistic, indeed at times chaotic surface of everyday life, a simple order may be made manifest. This trust bears witness to an interdenominational fundamental religious attitude, inherent not in the superficial details of *tintinnabuli* technique but anchored at a more profound structural level.

¹⁰ APK 2-2.3.165. Special thanks to Kristina Kõrver of the Arvo Pärt Centre for drawing my attention to this.

¹¹ The original Estonian text: "Kõigepealt sa pead ennast nulliks tegema. Peab olema vaikus. Sa pead leppima oma jõuetusega. Ja see, mis siis antakse, on nagu kingitus." (Unpublished interview by Immo Mihkelson, 27 October 2014, Arvo Pärt Centre)

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Kompositsiooniprotsessi jooni Arvo Pärdi *tintinnabuli*-tehnikas

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Leopold Brauneiss

Pärdi teoseid, milles *tintinnabuli*-stiili ideed välja kujunesid, iseloomustab süsteemipärane komponeerimisviis, mis korrastab ja ühendab omavahel lihtsate reeglite abil kolmköla ja diatoonilise helirea tonaalseid põhikomponente. Süsteemne komponeerimine eelnevalt leitud reeglite alusel – pärand Pärdi varases loomingus läbiproovitud kaksteisthelitehnikast ja selle edasiarendustest – viib viimasega võrreldes muutunud, koguni vastandlike ilminguteni, mida ei organiseeri rangel viisil mitte enam 12-heliread, vaid kolmköla ja helirea harjumuslikud, s.t. mitte individuaalseina loodud põhiosised: piirdumine tuttava diatoonilise heliarsenaliga toob kaasa taandamise ja lihtsustamise ka reeglites endis.

Materjali sedalaadi lihtsustamisele lisandub ühe erijoonena veel teksti struktuurikujundav roll: kõigis oma formaalsetes detailides, nagu sõnajärg, kirjavahemärgid, iga sõna silpide arv ja sõnarõhk, otsekui tõlgitaks see sõna-sõnalt ja lause-lauserelt muusikasse. Komponeerimise esmane, ettevalmistav samm on seejuures teksti liigendamine ja erinevate formaalsete parameetrite analüüs: selle protsessi suurepäraseks näiteks on Pärdi „Te Deum“.

Järgmiseks sammuks on lihtsate reeglite põhjal tekstist ühehääelse meloodialiini genereerimine. Kuna reeglid kehtivad vähemalt teose ühe tervikliku lõigu piires, ei saa üksikasju põhimõtteliselt varieerida – pigem tuleb reeglid valida selliselt, et nad annaksid igal hetkel rahuldava muusikalise tulemuse. Nii näeme Pärdi muusikapäevikus – väga kujukalt taas „Te Deumi“ teksti ühe lause puhul –, kuidas Pärt katsetab erinevaid reegleid ning jätab need kõrvale kohe, kui tulemus teda muusikaliselt ei rahulda.

See pideva katsetamise, loobumise ja muutmise protsess, mis lõpeb alles ideaalse kõlalise kujundi leidmisel, kordub samuti kõrgemal tasandil, kus leitud ühehäälane meloodialiin peab järgmise sammuna ning taas rangelt reeglipäraselt viima mitmehääelse faktuurini: heaks näiteks on siin üks „Passio“ neljahäälane koorilõik.

Visandites alanud täiusliku reeglite süsteemi otsingud ei lõpe ka pärast esiettekannet, vaid jätkuvad kõlakogemust arvesse võtvais korrektuurides. Need võivad muuta üksnes rütmidetaile – nagu näiteks „Passio“ puhul – või ka muusikalist tekstuuri, nagu kuuendas „Seitsmest *magnificat*’i antifonist“, mis on hiljem täiendatud karakterse lisahäälega.

Selline süsteemne komponeerimisviis, mis lähtub etteantud, enamasti sakraalsest tekstist, väljendab kokkuvõttes esteetilist hoiakut, milles helilooja mina jääb tagaplaanile, et saada otsekui väljastpoolt täidetud. Seda võib mõista peegeldusena religioosest eluhoiakust, milles isiku tagasitõmbumises pääseb mõjule Jumalik.

Tõlkinud Toomas Siitan