

# A PORTRAIT Arvo Pärt



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**b. 1935**

## Preface

Profoundly religious, deeply private, Arvo Pärt has sometimes been portrayed as a saintly ascetic, out of touch with the modern world. His music, on the other hand, moves listeners wherever it is heard. Although its simplicity draws on a deep well of religious tradition, it does not demand that listeners share the composer's faith. Nor, as his detractors suggest, is it a music that has come easy. Consistently setting himself against received wisdoms, Pärt has grappled with the musical heritage available to him, reshaping it to his own ends, often at the cost of great personal torment. This musical portrait, celebrating the composer's seventieth birthday year, assembles some of the highlights from a body of work that is both deeply personal and widely appreciated.

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## Track List

### CD I

- |     |  |                         |
|-----|--|-------------------------|
| [1] | <b>Für Alina</b><br>Alexei Lubimov, piano  | 2:06<br>BIS: BIS-CD-702 |
| [2] | <b>Symphony No. I</b><br>Second Movement<br>Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Neeme Järvi   | 6:23<br>BIS: BIS-CD-434 |
| [3] | <b>Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten</b><br>Strings of Hungarian State Opera Orchestra / Antal Eisrich, percussion / Tamás Benedek | 7:39<br>Naxos 8.553750  |
| [4] | <b>Passio</b> (extract)<br>'Passio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem'<br>Tonus Peregrinus / Antony Pitts                   | 3:48<br>Naxos 8.555860  |
| [5] | <b>Berliner Messe</b><br>Kyrie<br>Elora Festival Singers and Orchestra / Noel Edison   | 2:43<br>Naxos 8.557299  |
| [6] | <b>Fratres for cello and piano</b><br>Tibor Párkányi, cello / Sándor Falvai, piano   | 11:49<br>Naxos 8.553750 |
| [7] | <b>Magnificat</b><br>Elora Festival Singers and Orchestra / Noel Edison  | 7:06<br>Naxos 8.557299  |

- |      |   |                 |
|------|---|-----------------|
| 8    | <b>Summa for strings</b>  | 3:44            |
|      | Strings of Hungarian State Opera Orchestra / Tamás Benedek                    | Naxos 8.553750  |
| <br> |   |                 |
| 9    | <b>Passio</b> (extract)<br>““Unde es tu?” Jesus autem responsum non dedit ei” | 12:22           |
|      | Tonus Peregrinus / Antony Pitts   | Naxos 8.555860  |
| <br> |   |                 |
| 10   | <b>Berliner Messe</b><br>Credo  | 4:14            |
|      | Elora Festival Singers and Orchestra / Noel Edison                            | Naxos 8.557299  |
| <br> |   |                 |
| 11   | <b>The Beatitudes</b>   | 7:50            |
|      | Elora Festival Singers and Orchestra / Jurgén Petrenko, organ / Noel Edison   | Naxos 8.557299  |
| <br> |   |                 |
|      | <b>Annum per annum for organ</b>  | 7:32            |
| 12   | Einleitung  | 0:44            |
| 13   | K   | 1:01            |
| 14   | G   | 0:59            |
| 15   | C   | 1:08            |
| 16   | S   | 1:04            |
| 17   | A   | 1:46            |
| 18   | Coda  | 0:50            |
|      | Kevin Bowyer, organ   | Nimbus: NI 5675 |

**TT 78:29**

## CD 2

**1** **Fratres for strings and percussion** 8:54

Antal Eisrich & Miklós Kovács, percussion / Strings of Hungarian

State Opera Orchestra / Tamás Benedek

Naxos 8.553750

**Collage über B-A-C-H** 7:27

**2** Toccata 2:47

**3** Sarabande 3:07

**4** Ricercare 1:40

Ulster Orchestra / Takuo Yuasa

Naxos 8.554591

**Pro et Contra for cello and orchestra** 8:46

**5** I. Maestoso 5:04

**6** II. Largo 0:30

**7** III. Allegro 3:12

Frans Helmerson, cello / Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Neeme Järvi

BIS: BIS-CD-434

## Symphony No. 3

**8** Third Movement 7:42

Ulster Orchestra / Takuo Yuasa

Naxos 8.554591

**9** **Cantate Domino canticum novum (Psalm 95)** 3:24

Elora Festival Singers and Orchestra / Jurgén Petrenko, organ / Noel Edison

Naxos 8.557299

**10** **Spiegel im Spiegel** 8:56

Daniel Hope, violin / Simon Mulligan, piano

Nimbus: NI 5631

## **Triodion**

15:39

**[11]** Introduction / Ode I

4:39

**[12]** Ode II

5:25

**[13]** Ode III / Coda

5:35

The Choir of Lancing College / Peter Davis, organ / Neil Cox

Claudio: CC4943-2

## **Tabula Rasa**

**[14]** Ludus

9:48

Leslie Hatfield & Rebecca Hirsch, violins / Ulster Orchestra / Takuo Yuasa

Naxos 8.554591

## **Passio (extract)**

**[15]** 'Et ex illa hora accepit eam discipulus in sua'

4:26

Tonus Peregrinus / Antony Pitts

Naxos 8.555860

**TT 75:59**

## Introduction

Contemporary classical music which genuinely touches people is rare, but the rapt, contemplative music of Arvo Pärt communicates readily, and without pandering to the demands of a mass audience. For thirty years Pärt has striven to pare away everything inessential in his work, so that the silence following a note often has the same aesthetic, emotional and spiritual weight as the note itself. It is the pristine simplicity of Pärt's music which moves listeners, but that same quality has also alienated critics and commentators for whom complexity is a necessary ingredient of truly contemporary music.

Their view does not accord with Pärt's own. An intensely private man, he does not go out of his way to court journalists and critics, but he is not obstructive. I have had the good fortune to interview him on several occasions, including once in Stockholm, where he was attending recording sessions for some of his early works, and later in Norwich Cathedral, where he was attending the cathedral choir's rehearsals for the premiere of a new piece, *I am the True Vine*.

On each occasion, he was unfailingly polite and helpful, and a highly individual sense of humour repeatedly bubbled to the surface, often in unexpected ways. When I spoke to him in Norwich, his wife Nora was present. I asked Pärt whether composer's block was ever a problem he faced, and if so, how he dealt with it. 'It is rare that writing music is easy,' he replied. 'But you should ask my wife. She suffers more in these cases than I do.' Nora Pärt suggested that her



husband's solution to the problem was to go into the kitchen. 'I peel potatoes. That calms me down,' Pärt said with a delighted laugh. 'Even when we don't need potatoes,' added his wife with mock severity.

It was an engaging glimpse of the down-to-earth man behind the artist, and a useful counterbalance to images (both verbal and visual) that have presented Pärt as some kind of saint or seer. But discussing his own work is not something that he finds easy: 'Talking about my music traps me in a vicious circle,' he told me, 'and it's seldom that I manage to escape. While I'm writing a new piece, I mustn't talk about it because then I lose the impulse to write it. Once it's written, then there is nothing left to say.'

There is a parallel here with what has become Pärt's most famous statement about music: 'I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played.' That encapsulates the purity which characterises Pärt's music, and which has played such an important part in attracting so many listeners. On the other hand, it might also be taken as a negation of the composer's role: if one note played beautifully is sufficient, what is there for the composer to do? Is the act of composition redundant? Happily not. As Pärt expanded on the point to me:

This is the mystery of music. I'm talking of an inner tone. You could perhaps compare it with the upbeat of a conductor. There is no music yet, we can't hear a thing, and yet the musicians can see it, they know the character, the dynamic and the tempo of the music. Just as with those musicians, the composer's whole inner being must be prepared for what follows.

## Arvo Pärt: A Portrait

Pärt has been a composer whose music does indeed emerge from his 'whole inner being', and his catalogue of works is extensive. It includes tiny miniatures for solo piano alongside gigantic choral works, the vast majority written to give voice to Pärt's Christianity, which follows the tenets of the Russian Orthodox Church (although he was baptised a Lutheran). Many of those who love his work are themselves Christian, but many more are not. Just as we do not need to share Bach's beliefs to enjoy his music, so we can be moved by Pärt's work without necessarily sharing the faith that underpins it.

This is the introductory chapter of Arvo Pärt: A Portrait.  
The full biographical essay, illustrated with photographs, is available to buy.  
For more details, please visit [www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com).