

## The Passion: A Crossroad between Paths

Art is believed to be one of the most accurate mirrors of human life. If this is true, 20th Century music represents a very chaotic life. The coming of a new era is clear since the invention of the “Twelve tone music”, Schönberg’s Dodecaphony. Many composers begin to find various interesting research fields. Strolling around Europe at the beginning of the siècle, we could also come across Debussy annihilating melody and harmony and creating a new “impressionistic” commixture; or Bartók, absorbed in his studies on popular music traditions, trying to intermingle classical and peasant music; or Scriabin, investigating the connections between colors and sounds. Not mentioning the gigantic and chameleon-like figure of Igor Stravinsky, which, if we consider his artistic output at large, could stand for the résumé of all styles in the first part of the Twentieth Century.

In the complexity of this picture, sacred music seems to have lost ground: not so many artists were concerned with sacred works in the last century. In this perspective, the production of the composers coming from Eastern Europe seems to be a dazzling exception. Among these ones, we absolutely have to mention two names, whose productions clearly show a deep and continuative involvement in sacral music: Krzysztof Penderecki (1933) and Arvo Pärt (1935). Among the pieces written by these two authors, two works in particular are remarkable: *St. Luke Passion* and *Passio*. Despite their differences in conception and mood – they are hence wonderful examples of the divergence of thought I just sketched out –, they have many interesting and unexpected common traits.

Penderecki’s career begins with very “scandalous” (but nonetheless successful) works: *Anaklasis*, *Thren (for the Victims of Hiroshima)*, *Fonogrammi*, *Polymorphia*, *Fluorescencje*, written between 1959 and 1962, clearly convey the composer’s will to go over the brink, to work out new techniques (esp. concerning the string family) and move away from conventional standards. The colossal *St. Luke Passion* (1963–66) opens a new door in his production: the peculiar “raw” sound of the previous works – based on the idea that “sound includes noise” – becomes milder, seems to backtrack. The new path was already within sight in the *Stabat Mater* (1962) for three choirs, annexed to the *Passion* some years after: at the very end of this piece the listeners, after eight minutes dominated by dissonant sounds, experience the unexpected shock of a major chord (D major). The same strong consternation (this time caused by an E major chord) seizes the listeners (and critics) at the end of the *Passion*, “this time after a mostly hushed and lugubrious chromatic piece”.<sup>1</sup>

Arvo Pärt introduces himself as a composer with serial works: from 1960 to 1968 (that is to say from *Nekrolog* to *Credo*) he employs serial procedures (*Perpetuum Mobile* applies serial technique to all parameters – pitch, duration, rhythm), till he comes to a dead end. In *Pro et contra* (1966) he already begins to have doubts about his compositional methods, and we can sense a strong contrast between moments of rude dissonance and instants of celestial consonance. From 1968 he experiences a musical impasse, which forces him to find new spurs. He becomes interested in ancient monody and finds himself buried in studying it, concentrating on simple melodic lines. After a decade, Pärt feels regenerated and is able to “resurface” setting out his first pieces in “tintinnabuli” style, a brand new technique, very simple in method, but very powerful in impact: every melodic line (which Paul Hillier names M-voice) will be inextricably coupled with another line (the *tintinnabuli* voice, or T-voice) rotating around the M-voice, fixed in its pitches (a triad), that provides a sort of “harmonic” sensation. “In tintinnabuli music, where the harmony does not ‘move’, the harmonic framework has been tilted sideways to form a musical line, and the relationship between two different kinds of melodic movement creates a harmonic resonance which is essentially the triad and the fluctuating attendance of diatonic dissonances. [...] a single moment spread out in time”.<sup>2</sup> *Passio*, written in 1982 is the summa of tintinnabuli production, Pärt’s pivotal work. In Ex. 1 – a manuscript page showing some annotations about *Passio* – it is clear how M-voice and T-voice interconnect.

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Jacobson, *A Polish Renaissance*. 1996 Phaidon Press Limited, p. 150.

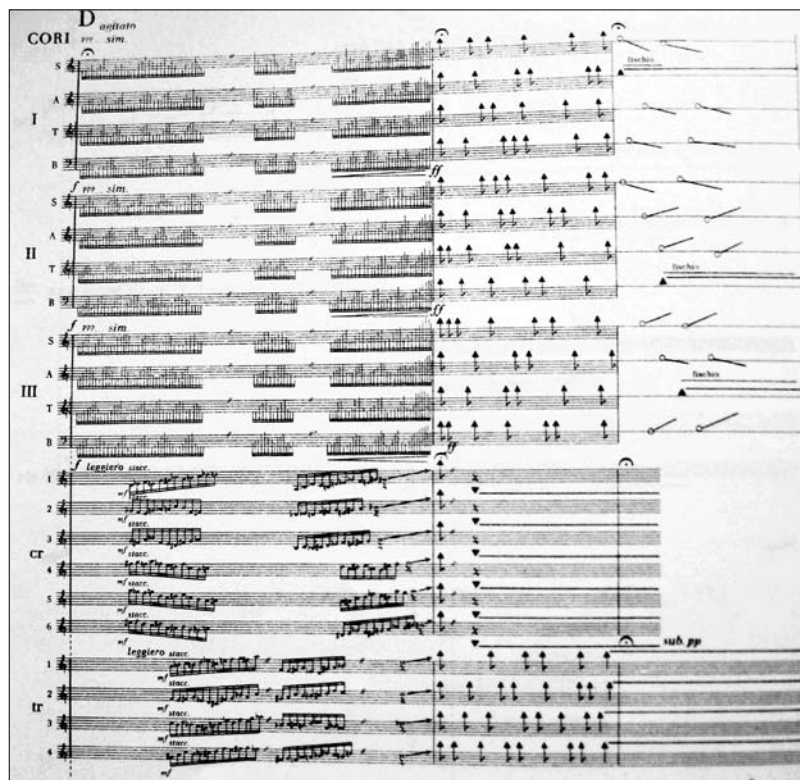
<sup>2</sup> P. Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 1997 Oxford University Press, p. 90.

Example 1



At first sight – or better said, at first listening – the two passions are very different in many ways. Penderecki’s passion, which rings up the curtain with a violent outburst on the word “Cruz” (*cross*), needs a large orchestra (a host of instruments), a boy’s choir and an incredibly crowded mixed choir (split into three different groups). This horde, although Penderecki “never calls for all the orchestra in any given movements” – as Robinson and Winold correctly point out<sup>3</sup> –, is almost always busy in mumbling, or crying, producing noise, or slyly disturbing the four soloists (see Ex. 2 and 3).

Example 2



<sup>3</sup> Ray Robinson, Allen Winold, *A Study of the Penderecki St. Luke Passion*, 1983 Moeck Verlag, p. 60.

Example 3

The image shows a musical score for four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and organ accompaniment. The score is divided into three systems, each marked "sussurrando". The lyrics are "responde mi-hi" and "res-pon-de mi-hi". The organ part is marked with a forte dynamic (f). The vocal parts are marked with a mezzo-forte dynamic (mf). The organ part is marked with a forte dynamic (f). The vocal parts are marked with a mezzo-forte dynamic (mf). The organ part is marked with a forte dynamic (f). The vocal parts are marked with a mezzo-forte dynamic (mf). The organ part is marked with a forte dynamic (f).

Pärt's sound is much more restrained and sober: a very small group of instruments (a quartet made up of a violin, an oboe, a cello and a bassoon, accompanied by an organ) provide the humble basis on which the soloists move. *Passio* shows the influence of its models from its very beginning, where the choir, in accordance with the 16th and 17th Century tradition (let us think about Schütz's *Historiae*) and with a powerful exordium, exposes the whole title of the work, *Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem*.

The adoption of two different types of text is revealing. *Passio*, a purely narrative piece, is entirely conceived on St. John's Gospel (18: 1–40; 19: 1–30), giving an impression of continuity and stability, which wonderfully matches with the general mood of the work. Penderecki's passion, on the contrary, is based on a collage of fragments coming from St. Luke's Gospel, St. John's Gospel, Old Testament, Psalms and the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Also because of this variety of sources, the composition becomes multi-faceted and intensely dramatic. The external organization of the composition in two sharply separated sections is also a necessity in trying to shape such a heterogeneous and articulated material. Pärt, who, thanks to the cohesion provided by the text, doesn't need a particular structural model, has the possibility to mould a three-part composition (almost) without interruption, melodically developed in order to form (visually, at least) a cross, perfectly symmetrical in its *exordium* and *conclusio* (see Ex. 4).

Example 4

The image shows a musical score for three sections: Exordium, Passio, and Conclusio. The Exordium is for choir and organ. The Passio is for Evangelist. The Conclusio is for choir and organ. The Turba, Pilatus, and Christus parts are also shown. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. The Exordium is marked with a forte dynamic (f). The Passio is marked with a mezzo-forte dynamic (mf). The Conclusio is marked with a forte dynamic (f). The Turba, Pilatus, and Christus parts are marked with a mezzo-forte dynamic (mf).

Nonetheless, the two passions have many elements in common. The most important of all is beyond all doubt the semitone, which plays a fundamental role within both scores.

*St. Luke Passion* is the endpoint of a compositional path entirely replete with “micro intervals”, and it would be obviously impossible to imagine such a sudden “three-point turn”. As a matter of fact, from the very beginning of the piece Penderecki uses the semitone in a horizontal and – at the same time – vertical way: all the themes that run through the work are clearly based on the semitone (as it is evident in Ex. 5), but also many explosions abruptly ripping the score are made up of layers of chords separated by an interval of a semitone. One of the best examples is traceable at the end of the first part, when the *turba* harshly yell at Pilate the disturbing “*Crucifige illum*”. The minor 2nd is not only a dramatic effect, but holds then a structural importance – it could be possible to write a history on the importance of the semitone in music – and gives consistency to the piece.

#### Example 5

The image displays 22 numbered musical phrases, each on a separate staff. The phrases are: 1 Sigh, 2 Cantus firmus - I (CF-I), 3 Cantus firmus II (CF-II), 4 BACH-retro, 5 BACH, 6 Stabat mater, 7 Sigh-inv., 8 Deus meus, 9 Domine, 10 Deus-meus-inv., 11 Jerusalem, 12 BACH var., 13 CF-I-inv., 14 Judica me, 15 Jerusalem-var., 16 Święty Boże, 17 CF-II-inv., 18 CF-II-retro, 19 Misereere, 20 CF-II-retro-inv., 21 Deus-meus-var., 22 Deus-meus-inv.

The tintinnabuli technique gives rise to many semitones in its workings, but eventually the sound produced by the two interwoven voices is always neutral and somehow smooth. Nevertheless, sometimes Pärt wants to underline a particular situation and uses the semitone giving a moment a great potential energy. For example, the scene of Pilate we mentioned in Penderecki can be found also in *Passio*: when the choir sings “*Crucifige eum*”, a E major chord is “jammed” by a F, which creates a strange and threatening sensation in the listeners, normally unaccustomed to this friction. The same situation occurs at the beginning of the piece, when Jesus is approached by Judas and a band of officers come to arrest him. When he asks them “*Quem quaeritis*” (“Whom seek ye?”), they answer “*Jesum Nazarenum*”, and another resounding E major chord is disturbed by a F. In doing so, Pärt is able to connect some far-away moments within *Passio* creating a sort of “harmonic Leitmotifs” based on the semitone.

The finale of the two passions is probably the most striking common feature: *Passio* ends with a D major chord, a coherent conclusion, but also *St. Luke Passion* – as I already anticipated at the beginning of this poster – closes down with an unexpected E major chord, which gives the work a much more dramatic impact. This very finale (exactly as the previous one in the *Stabat Mater*) is a clue of the new path taken by Penderecki, a re-orienting towards tonality, which will provoke a bedlam in the higher echelons of the world of music. Another feature which connects two pieces outwardly so dissimilar in thought and purpose, and that obliges us to rethink the relations between the different compositions swarming around 20th Century.

## Santrauka

### **Pasija: kryžkelė tarp dviejų kelių**

1966 m. kovo 30 d. Miunsteryje buvo pirmą kartą atlikta lenkų kompozitoriaus Krzysztofo Pendereckio „Pasija pagal Luką“. Po 16 metų, 1982 m. lapkričio 27 d., Miunchene įvyko kito kūrinio premjera: estų kompozitoriaus Arvo Pärto „Pasija pagal Joną“. Abu šie kūriniai yra vieni svarbiausių šių kompozitorių darbų. „Pasija pagal Luką“ pristato „svarbiausią tiltą tarp liturgijos dvasios ir modernios muzikos“ (H. H. Stuckenschmidt), o „Pasija pagal Joną“ yra „esmingiausias *tintinnabuli* stiliaus darbas“ (P. Hillier) tarp Pärto kūrinių.

Pendereckio ir Pärto sakraliniai kūriniai, kurie sudaro svarbią jų kūrybos dalį, ryškiai atskleidžia sakralinės muzikos gyvybingumą XX a. antroje pusėje ir toliau meta iššūkį daugeliui šiuolaikinių kompozitorių. Šios dvi pasijos parodo, kokie gali būti skirtingi to paties „objekto“ vizijos rezultatai – šiuo atveju tai yra liudijimas apie Jėzaus Kristaus paskutines dienas (nors ir pateiktas dviejų skirtingų evangelistų).

Pranešimo tikslas – ištirti du radikaliai skirtingų šiuolaikinių kompozitorių nueitus kelius puoselėjant sakralinės muzikos tradicijas.