

## Arvo Part – Passion

Written by bluesever  
Sunday, 24 March 2013 14:32 -

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### Arvo Part – Passion

Arvo Pärt's 1982 setting of the **St John Passion** is performed relatively rarely, perhaps because it doesn't translate so well to the secular environment in which most art and music is appreciated nowadays. However, Arvo Pärt's *Passio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem* is perhaps one of the best-known, and ranks as one of the greatest late-twentieth-century choral works.

### Arvo Part - Passio

**Arvo Part** has composed in several styles during his 40-year career, but the most popular is his "**tintinnabuli**" (from the Latin *tintinnabulum*, a bell) style of the 1970s and 1980s, when he chose to turn away from the avant-garde towards the simpler, bell-like sonorities of medieval Western music and plainsong.



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Because of the frugal nature of the music, as well as the religious titles of many of his works of this time, this style has been called by some "*holy minimalism*".



## Arvo Part

When Pärt left Estonia for Austria in 1980, he took with him the first sketches for the St. John Passion, which would become the culmination of the "tintinnabuli" style. He eventually finished the work in 1982 and it was published in 1989. Since then, it has been recorded three times, and remains one of his most popular works. In much the same way that Pärt was inspired by medieval music in his creation of tintinnabuli, here too he is inspired by the earliest monophonic settings of the Passion.



## Jesus Christ Passion

**The St. John Passion** is a through-composed setting of the text of John 18: 1-40 and 19: 1-42,

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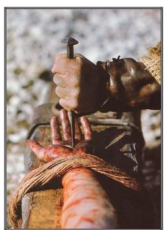
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preceded by a short introduction ( *Exordio*) and followed by a brief conclusion ( *Conclusio*). He uses a baritone soloist for Jesus, a tenor for Pilate, and a Soprano-Alto-Tenor-Bass (SATB) quartet for the evangelist. In addition, there are four solo instruments, oboe, violin, cello and bassoon, organ and SATB choir.



## Jesus Christ Passion

Pärt divides the Evangelist text into four sections (50 phrases each), plus a final concluding section of 10 phrases, for a total of 210. Each section begins with a different solo voice, an instrument then joins it, and this pattern continues until all 8 are sounding.



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The work begins with a short, striking choral introduction, or Exordio, which announces the Passion gospel and also establishes the A minor tonality upon which the entire piece is based. There follows a straightforward setting of the Latin Passion narrative from John's gospel with nothing added or omitted. Pärt's setting ends immediately after the death of Christ, unlike many which continue to the burial. The work ends with a Conclusio, given like the opening Exordio by organ and choir, only now in the key of D major, thus giving a resplendent feel to the final words and concluding Amen.



## Jesus Christ Passion

Each constituent – Jesus, Pilate, the choir, the Evangelist double quartet – adheres strictly to its own musical material, with a distinctive harmonic and rhythmic character. This lends the work a feeling of inevitability and, in a sense, 'uneventfulness' similar to the chanted liturgical recitation of the Passion gospel.



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It is a work of unique beauty. Its meditative, intensely spiritual quality is static; the listener will find no outbursts or overtly dramatic moments to latch on to as one does in Bach's Passions. Here the story is told with a lack of overt emotionalism which quickly becomes hypnotic.



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