

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir

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Kadri Toomoja organ

Tõnu Kaljuste conductor

Arvo Pärt (b.1935)

Littlemore Tractus (2000) • text: John Henry Newman (1801–1890) 6'

Da pacem Domine (2004/2006) • 9th-century Gregorian antiphon 6'

Veni creator (2006) • hymn for Pentecost 3'

Magnificat (1989) • canticle of Mary: Luke 1:46–55 7'

The Deer's Cry (2017) • 5th-century Irish prayer: 'St Patrick's Breastplate' 5'

Für Jan van Eyck (2019) • Latin mass: Agnus Dei 3'

Galina Grigorjeva (b.1962)

Chto nastanet vesna ('Spring is Coming', Svyatki, 2004) • from Russian folklore 3'

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

All-Night Vigil (Vespers), Op.37 (1915):

vii. Slava v vishnikh Bogu ('Glory to God in the highest') • Luke 2; Psalm 51 3'

vi. Bogoroditse Devo ('Rejoice, O Virgin') • Orthodox prayer to the Mother of God 3'

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Ich lasse dich nicht, BWV Anh.159 (c.1712–35) • Genesis 32; chorale by Erasmus Alberus (c.1500–1553) 5'

Arvo Pärt

Peace upon you, Jerusalem (2002) • Psalm 122 6'

De profundis (1980) • Psalm 130 7'

Veljo Tormis (1930–2017)

Raua needmine ('Curse Upon Iron') (1972, rev. 1991) 10'

Words from the Finnish national epic Kalevala, adapted and augmented by August Annist, Paul-Eerik Rummo & Jaan Kaplinski

Arvo Pärt

Vater Unser (2005, rev. 2011) • The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9–13 3'

Arvo Pärt, born in Estonia in 1935 and celebrating his 90th birthday later this year, has had a career among the most extraordinary of any composer living today. Growing up within the Soviet Union and withstanding political pressures that silenced many of his contemporaries, he mastered not one but several musical styles. Early essays in the serial technique of Schoenberg and Webern gave way to the collage style of works such as *Credo* (1968), in which the tonality of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* confronts modernist dissonance and ultimately emerges victorious. The composition of *Credo* was the culmination of this first phase of Pärt's career, but was followed by dramatic changes of direction – religious, musical and political.

In 1972 Pärt joined the Orthodox Church, and all his subsequent music has revealed his profound faith: 'religion influences everything', he has said, 'not just music'. During the 1970s, Pärt rejected modernism, immersing himself instead in Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony and the music of the Notre-Dame school of the 12th and 13th centuries. He emerged with an entirely new approach to composition which he named 'tintinnabulation', after the Latin *tintinnabulum*, meaning 'bells' or 'chimes'. By the end of the decade, the expression of humanitarian convictions and religious beliefs had become so problematic in Soviet Estonia that Pärt and his family decided to leave, settling first in Vienna and then Berlin. He returned to Estonia in 2010, where he continues to live.

De profundis, the earliest piece by Pärt performed tonight, was composed in 1980, shortly after he left Estonia. Its setting of Psalm 130 begins with a single line, exemplifying Pärt's radical stylistic purification – 'it is enough when a single note is beautifully played' – before adding voices, transforming individual lamentation into collective yearning. Using a single pitch as a focal point is another hallmark of Pärt's new approach: **Magnificat** (1989), for example, centres on the starting note C, which anchors expressive melodic lines that set Mary's hymn of praise, exemplifying his idea of tintinnabulation as a technique that unites melody and triad into a single indivisible unity.

Pärt's new thinking of the 1970s has in the ensuing half-century underpinned a rich vein of music, both vocal and instrumental. Indeed, Pärt frequently does not distinguish between the two, with simple but striking combinations of lines often serving equally well for choirs and instruments. The choral composition **Da pacem Domine** (2004), for example, which uses the 9th-century Gregorian antiphon that gives the work its title as a *cantus firmus* (a fundamental, repeating voice), has been followed by versions for cellos, saxophones, recorders and several other instrumental combinations. Likewise, **Littlemore Tractus** (2001), a setting of the final lines of one of John Henry Newman's most famous sermons and commissioned to mark the 200th anniversary of the saint's birth, later generated the orchestral piece *Swansong*.

Since the start of the century Pärt has moved away from strict application of the tintinnabulation principle, composing pieces that emphasise traditional tonal harmony, such as **The Deer's Cry** (2007), whose setting of St Patrick's Breastplate is rooted in A minor, or that focus on a single

line, such as **Vater Unser** (2005), a melody whose simplicity illuminates the familiar text of the Lord's Prayer. Many of Pärt's more recent works display an exuberance at odds with his reputation for slow and contemplative music: **Peace upon you, Jerusalem** (2002) brings rhythmic vigour to the female voices' joyful incantation of Psalm 122, while **Veni Creator** (2006) draws out the festive character of the Pentecostal hymn.

Even throughout his ninth decade, Pärt continued to produce new music. **Für Jan van Eyck**, the most recent work performed tonight, was commissioned by the city of Ghent to celebrate the restoration in 2020 of the [altarpiece](#) in St Bavo's Cathedral. This masterpiece, painted by the van Eyck brothers in 1432 and depicting the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, inspired Pärt to revisit the Agnus Dei ('Lamb of God') from the *Berliner Messe* he had composed exactly 40 years earlier – thus demonstrating the constancy of his commitment to music's spiritual purpose across the course of his remarkable career. As Alex Ross writes, 'he has put his finger on something that is almost impossible to put into words ... the power of music to obliterate the rigidities of space and time. One after the other, his chords silence the noise of the self, binding the mind to an eternal present.'

Pärt's music is complemented in tonight's programme by pieces from two other composers who, like Pärt, have enjoyed a long and fruitful association with the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and Tõnu Kaljuste. Pärt's Estonian contemporary (and teacher) Veljo Tormis composed over 100 choral works, of which **Curse upon Iron** is among the most frequently performed. It was inspired by Tormis's heartfelt opposition to violence and his interest in shamanism: 'in order to acquire power over a material or immaterial thing, one communicates knowledge ... the magical rite is performed to restrain the evil hiding inside iron.' It includes a part for shaman drum generally played by the conductor. Galina Grigorjeva was born in Ukraine but lives and works in Estonia. Her cycle of choral works, *Svyatki*, composed between 1997 and 2004, draws on both Orthodox Christianity and a pre-Christian tradition of pagan belief and ritual, and celebrates the period between Christmas and Epiphany. Like the rest of the cycle, **'Spring is Coming'** does not directly quote folk music but is deeply influenced by its rhythms and structures.

The programme is completed by pieces from two earlier composers who, despite coming from very different periods, cultures and systems of religious belief from Pärt, share his ability to communicate profound spiritual truths through music. Rachmaninoff's **Vespers** were composed in an intense two-week period of activity in early 1915 while he was touring Russia with the conductor Serge Koussevitsky in support of the country's war effort. 'Bogoroditse Devo' is a serene hymn of praise to the Virgin Mary, while 'Slava v vyshnikh Bogu' is a majestic setting of responses sung at Matins. **Ich lasse dich nicht** is an elaborate unaccompanied eight-part motet once published in the name of Bach's son Johann Christoph, but now firmly attributed to Johann Sebastian: its exact origins are unclear, however, with some scholars believing that it brings together material composed both before and after Bach's arrival in Leipzig as *Thomaskantor* in 1723.

Eesti Filharmonial Kammerkoor / Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir

Tõnu Kaljuste artistic director and chief conductor

Mai Simson choirmaster

Kadri Toomoja organ

Soprano

Yena Choi – soloist for *Veni creator* and *Vater unser*

Annika Lõhmus – soloist for *Magnificat*

Laura Štoma

Marie Roos

Mirell Jakobson

Eleri-Kristel Kuimet

Birke Elisabeth Jakobson

Alto

Ave Hännikäinen

Marianne Pärna

Anni Marie Rea

Annely Leinberg

Kristel Marand

Cätly Talvik,

Maarja Helstein

Tenor

Danila Frantou

Kaido Janke

Raul Mikson

Miguel Gonçalves Silva

Toomas Tohert – soloist for *Curse Upon Iron*

Kaarel Telgmaa

Zhizhong Xie

Bass

Henry Tiisma

Kim Sargsyan

Geir Luht – soloist for *Curse Upon Iron*

Rainer Vilu

Kristjan-Jaanek Mölder

Aarne Talvik

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Surtitle credits

Arvo Pärt:

Da pacem Domine – Book of Common Prayer (1662)

Magnificat; Peace upon you, Jerusalem; De profundis; Vater unser – King James Bible

The Deer's Cry – English translation by James Henthorn Todd

Galina Grigorjeva: *Spring is Coming*

English translation by Andrew Colin and Lydia Mazzotti

Veljo Tormis: *Curse Upon Iron*

English translation by Eero Vihman, adapted by Kristin Kuutma