

The Composer's Hand: An Analysis of Arvo Pärt's String Orchestral Work, Psalom

Authors : Mark K. Johnson

Abstract : Arvo Pärt has composed over 80 text-based compositions based on nine different languages. But prior to 2015, it was not publicly known what texts the composer used in composing a number of his non-vocal works, nor the language of those texts. Because of this lack of information, few if any musical scholars have illustrated in any detail how textual structure applies to any of Pärt's instrumental compositions. However, in early 2015, the Arvo Pärt Centre in Estonia published *In Principio*, a compendium of the texts Pärt has used to derive many of the parameters of his text-based compositions. This paper provides the first detailed analysis of the relationship between structural aspects of the Church Slavonic Eastern Orthodox text of Psalm 112 and the musical parameters that Pärt used when composing the string orchestral work *Psalom*. It demonstrates that Pärt's text-based compositions are carefully crafted works, and that evidence of the presence of the 'invisible' hand of the composer can be found within every aspect of the underpinning structures, at the more elaborate middle ground level, and even within surface aspects of these works. Based on the analysis of *Psalom*, it is evident that the text Pärt selected for *Psalom* informed many of his decisions regarding the musical structures, parameters and processes that he deployed in composing this non-vocal text-based work. Many of these composerly decisions in relation to these various aspects cannot be fathomed without access to, and an understanding of, the text associated with the work.

Keywords : Arvo Pärt, minimalism, psalom, text-based process music

Conference Title : ICMS 2017 : International Conference on Music in Society

Conference Location : Vienna, Austria

Conference Dates : June 21-22, 2017