MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES, EMPIRICAL METHODS, AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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2. Cross and Consolation: Music's Empathic Spirituality

Peter C. Bouteneff

In Andrei Tarkovsky's stunning film of 1979, the eponymous Stalker philosophises as follows:

> You were speaking of the meaning of our life ... of the unselfishness of art ... Take music, for instance. ...If it is connected at all [to reality], this is just mechanics. It's not connected by way of ideas, only by sheer sound, devoid of any associations. And yet, music, as if by some miracle, gets through to our heart. What is it that resonates in us in response to noise brought to harmony, making it the source of the greatest delight which stuns us and brings us together?[1]

This somewhat tortured character is the most perspicacious of the film's core threesome and has the most important insights of them all. The others are stuck in a cold intellectualism. A liminal figure negotiating different planes of reality, the Stalker alone is capable of this perceptive observation about music and its unique power. Specifically, he speaks of its capacity to stun us, and to unite us to one another. Music acts in an elemental way that does not call attention to itself. It is 'unselfish'. So in the first instance this cinematic quotation calls us to reflect on the sheer power of music, to reach us, to stun us, and in some way to unite us.

1 *Stalker*, dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky (Goskino 1979).

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I. Music's Power

When scientific studies compare the various senses and the directness and immediacy of their reach into our inner lives, the olfactory always wins. Our brain's anatomy has it that smell is the most direct way into our nervous system, and therefore into our sensory world. Yet, despite the prominence of incense in some of our religious rites and practices, there is not nearly as much to be done with it, in the sense of 'sacred art', as there is with music. So it would be more difficult to argue that perfume or incense are the most spiritual of the arts.[2] The auditory shares an interesting feature with the olfactory: we cannot readily shut it off. We have eyelids that allow us readily to close ourselves off from the visual. But we do not have earlids. The input of sound is constant, short of our conscious decision to plug our ears with our fingers, but even then, the power of sound—more so than light—is felt on the entire body. Music is sound, and sound is the movement of air which impresses itself on the totality of the human body—and in a special way, on the eardrum and the mechanisms which translate those vibrations to the brain. And it is impossible to switch all of that off, perhaps not even in a comatose state—where music has been known to reach people as nothing else could.

This power of sound, of music, can cut both ways. As Arvo Pärt observed in a memorable conversation with the Icelandic composer Björk Guðmundsdóttir, 'You can kill people with sound. And, if you can kill [with it] then maybe there is sound which is the opposite of killing'.[3] That is rather minimalistic praise of music, or of the potential of sound. In a moment, he turns his attention to music, but initially Pärt means to point us to the extraordinary potential of sound, one that can cut both ways. It can, perhaps, actually give life. He goes on 'The distance between these two points [sound that kills and sound that gives life] is very big. And you are free. You can choose'.

2 But see Susan Ashbrook Harvey's classic *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 42 (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2006).

3 See 'Video: Björk Interviews Arvo Pärt', *Estonian World*, 16 July 2020, https://estonianworld.com/culture/video-bjork-interviews-arvo-part/

The suggestion here is that just as music is potentially the most vivifying of the arts, music, or at least sound more broadly, can likewise be the most potentially destructive. It was not rhetoric but song that the sirens used in order to lure the sailors of ancient myth to their destruction on the rocks. Religious puritans will always cavil at the appearance of any new form of music, from the Renaissance—where even the tritone, the 'devil's interval', sparked controversy—all the way up to the twentieth century, when jazz, blues, and rock were met with panic about the dangers of syncopation and infectious rhythm, not to mention the sexually provocative lyrics that often accompanied them.

Just as some people extol the spiritual potency of music, others live in fear of its power to deceive us into perdition. The point is that music is powerful stuff. Seeing music as somehow special, unique, and superlative in this regard is also not new. Identifying music with core principles, of mathematics, of the organisation of the universe, is a near perennial insight—at least as old as Pythagoras. Some of the earliest findings from prehistoric hominids 40,000 years ago include flutes made from bone, and we may suppose that vocalisation, and the rhythmic striking of things, long predated the sophistication of tooled wind instruments. In so far as the human being is a creative being, the human being is a musical entity.

What is the difference, then, between music's power, and its *spiritual* power? Or is there a difference?

II. Music's Spiritual Capacity

Sir James MacMillan's identification of music as 'the most spiritual of the arts' is a beautiful and bold assertion, naturally impossible to substantiate, and certain to be contested by proponents of poetry, the narrative arts, visual arts, cinema, dance, all of which are able to bring us to tears, as well as to our knees. Yet there really is something unique about music. In a fine essay published in the *Guardian*, MacMillan cites two contemporary churchmen to underscore his assertion.[4] One is the Scottish Jesuit John McDade, who says, 'Music may be the closest human

4 James MacMillan, 'Divine Accompaniment', *Guardian*, 18 July 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2003/jul/19/classicalmusicandopera.artsfeatures

analogue to the mystery of the direct and effective communication of grace'. The other is Rowan Williams—someone well versed in poetry, fiction, theatre, and iconography, who observes that 'To listen seriously to music, and to perform it, are among our most potent ways of learning what it is to live with and before God'.[5] Williams thus expresses the power of music in explicitly spiritual, theological terms. But note that neither thinker speaks in terms as absolute as MacMillan. McDade says 'maybe'. Williams says music is '*among* our most potent ways' Godward. He goes on just a bit later in a similarly strong-but-qualified observation, 'The authority of music, what silences us and holds us, is, then, *one of the fullest* parables we have of the authority of God'.[6]

I can relate to this reluctance to apply superlatives; we are all too aware of the alternatives that have equal claim to power and loftiness. We must be honest: calling music 'the most spiritual of the arts' is an indefensible claim, and yet it is being made by one of the greatest living composers of sacred music. I cannot but imagine that it was made in the spirit of almost playful provocation, as well as a call to serious attention not only to its transcendent power, but the singular nature of that potency. Music's uniqueness has to do with a concatenation of factors, including the elemental way in which sound acts on us, the mathematical formulas which bring us the harmonic series, the way that our sensory radar picks up on that harmony, all of which allow a musician to skilfully interweave harmony and dissonance, the visceral power of rhythm which too becomes the substrate of play between regularity, syncopation, and disruption. Music is an interaction of the materiality of sound, harmony, and rhythm, the conscious deployment of silence, and in all of this, the flow of time.[7] But thus far I've still only managed to suggest some of the factors involved in its power in general, and its uniqueness, without even getting into the question of the spiritual.

And that is largely because the 'spiritual' is notoriously (or happily) difficult to define and quantify. In fact, the impossibility of nailing it down is one of its inherent characteristics, one of the things that

5 See Rowan Williams, 'Keeping in Time', in Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgment: Sermons and Addresses* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994), p. 249.

6 Ibid., p. 249, my italics.

7 Time, indeed, is the focus of Rowan Williams' essay cited above.

makes the spiritual spiritual. Some of the qualities people associate with spirituality are so broad and vast that we could simply equate the potential power of music with its potential spiritual power. In other words, the way that music can make us feel—inspired, wistful, insignificant, enveloped, self-forgetting, or even empowered—is akin to many definitions of spirituality, especially as some of these feelings can be related to transcendence. Music transports us, and for a great number of people that is largely what spirituality consists of: bringing us to awareness of and communion with a vaster, more capacious, perhaps more significant realm.

III. Sacred Music and Its Texts

The relationship between music and spirituality—including spirituality-as-transcendence—comes into one particular focus in what we call 'sacred music'. Some audiences apply the category of 'sacred' or 'spiritual' to any piece of music that they have found to be transporting, whether it is Johann Sebastian Bach's Mass in B Minor or Radiohead's 'Idioteque'. In such cases, spirituality is entirely subjective. Fair enough. But, technically speaking, 'sacred music', as a genre or category, is music that has been composed with an explicit intention of praising God. In this case, we can at least provisionally link 'sacred' to 'religious'. As spiritually affecting as people may find John Luther Adams' 'Become Ocean', or Sigur Rós's 'Svefn-g-englar', these are not technically 'sacred music.'

There are of course borderline cases, such as John Coltrane's album, *A Love Supreme*, composed 'in gratitude to God', with words whose syllables are at some points articulated by Coltrane's saxophone.[8] Apart from dedications that indicate an overall intention or orientation, the explicitness of the God-praising intention of a composition lies in the texts to which it is set. Whether it is sung or otherwise heard, or—in rarer

8 In the liner notes to the 1965 album, released by Impulse! Records, Coltrane writes, 'This album is a humble offering to Him. An attempt to say "THANK YOU GOD" through our work, even as we do in our hearts and with our tongues. May He help and strengthen all men in every good endeavor'. The words to the fourth part of the composition, entitled 'Psalm' are 'sung' by Coltrane's sax. For this last point I am indebted to Yeshaya David M. Greenberg, who shared with me some of his own unpublished writing on the subject.

instances—where it is otherwise conveyed through melody and rhythm in syllabic mimesis,[9] text constitutes a fixed and traceable indicator of the sacred function of a piece of music.

We will recall Plato's caution about textless music.[10] Plato insisted that music could yield insight into the world's mysteries. But if people were to be taught by it properly rather than simply carried away with its visceral effects, they needed the words. Only words could reliably guide the composition of the music; the music must follow their shape and rhythm.[11] Augustine (354–430) agreed with Plato (ca. 427–348 BC) both about music's 'hidden affinity' with the human spirit, and with his insistence on text—on the words that would shepherd the listener's reaction and response.[12] Music and word thus belong in symbiotic relationship. And so, musical settings of sacred text—especially when these are artful and perhaps even prayerful—are spiritually affecting in a clearer and more quantifiable way.

Otherwise, we are back to generalised observations simply about music's 'power to transport'. These are, by definition, unmeasurable and subjective, even as they are also undeniable. But to be frank, calling attention to music's transcendent power can be mundane if not banal. Of course music can be transporting and beautiful and affective and make us forget about ourselves. I focus here on another dimension of the spiritual power of music, one that may appear more immanent than transcendent. For I think that music exerts much of its spiritual power by being empathetic. By this I mean that the spiritual power of music rests to a considerable degree in its capacity to reflect—and therefore 'hear' or register—our lived experience of the world, one which is inevitably bittersweet, simultaneously sad and bright.

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9 We have just seen how Coltrane does this. As for Arvo Pärt, to whom we will again turn shortly, see Peter Bouteneff, 'Tacit Texts: Considerations on Pärt's Settings of the Word', *Res Musica* 14 (2022), 76–81.

10 A helpful, concise summary of Plato on this subject can be found in Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (London: SPCK, 2008), pp. 80–82.

11 See Plato, *Republic* 3.398d. See Peter C. Bouteneff, *Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence* (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2015), pp. 61–62.

12 'I feel that when the sacred words are chanted well, our souls are moved and are more religiously and with a warmer devotion kindled to piety than if they are not so sung' (Augustine, *Confessions* 10.33.50, cited in Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 320, n. 36).

IV. Bright Sadness

The importance of empathy, and specifically the capacity of music to accompany and validate one's sadness, is likewise common in other art forms. The film *Inside Out* (2015), like many Pixar films, is ostensibly for children but carries its greatest and most profound pleasures for the adults in the room. *Inside Out* sets itself a goal that would be ambitious for any film, much less a work of children's animated fantasy: to alert us to the ways in which joy is not only inevitably tinged with sorrow, but even is enhanced, or 'thickened' by sorrow. One may argue that the film sees itself as a corrective of a particularly American obsession with happiness over everything else. Ironically, Pixar's parent corporation Disney used to call its theme park 'The Happiest Place on Earth', something that sounds to many of us like a nightmare. But *Inside Out* goes much further. One of the film's most important observations, one that assists its fundamental insight about the contribution that sadness makes to joy, is that those who are experiencing sorrow do not, in the first instance, want or need to be 'cheered up'. They need to be heard, listened to, accompanied, specifically in their desolation. Rather than chase away sorrow, we must give it its full due, trusting that when we do so it will only clarify for us what joy is in the first place.

One review of the film suggests that it asks and answers the question of what it means to 'be okay', in the sense of to be managing, to be doing alright.

> So what does it mean to be okay? It does not mean being happy. It has nothing to do with typical conceptions of success. ... Being okay is probably more akin to finding a sense of integrity in our actual disintegrated experiences.... It's about acknowledging the muck rather than escaping it. It's about working through unpleasantness rather than going around it or presuming that we will always arrive at the other side of it.
>
> To be okay is to be okay that we're not okay.[13]

Other films have made similar points—not only that happiness is not all it's cracked up to be, but that it is never unmitigated, unalloyed. In

13 Roberto Sirvent and Duncan Reyburn, 'Inside Out and Philosophy: What Does it Mean to be Okay?', *And Philosophy*, 7 November 2015, https://andphilosophy.com/2015/11/07/inside-out-and-philosophy-what-does-it-mean-to-be-okay

our cynical era, it is almost too easy to highlight the superficiality of happiness and brightness, such that to be happy is to be in denial. The films of David Lynch, as just one example, are characterised by that distrust of joy—even a kind of glorification of the ugly—and embody it disarmingly well. My intention in this chapter is simply to draw attention and give shape to the idea that the greatness and power of art may be proportional to the ways it reflects and puts us in touch with life's vicissitudes. Art is at its best when it is true to life, in its actual variegated complexity. We know that art can be powerful simply in making us feel something—anything—acutely. But great art will never be devoid of either joy or sadness. Rather it will artfully configure them together.

I am hopeful that these observations from cinema and art will amplify my point about music and its spirituality. Music is potentially expressive of the same range of human emotional experience, and of the range of feelings that inevitably describe our lives. Specifically, music is another medium for the artful configuration of joy and sadness. In certain misguided times and places, music that was seen as overly sad was suppressed—to wit the 'Picardy third', that final major-key triad ensuring that however 'sad' a composition was allowed to get, it could not end on that note, as it were. Not that major and minor tonalities are universally happy and sad respectively—there is a vast literature on that subject—but they are one of the more fundamental ways that Western music, at least, gives expression to these poles. And if the major is, for many, a 'happier' tonality, it is owing to the harmonic series, which makes the major third more inherently consonant than the minor third. So rather than obsess over major and minor as such, we can suggest that music reflects and moves us emotionally by a complex interweaving of consonance and dissonance. Whatever the mechanics, the positive and even spiritual power of music that allows itself to enter the realms of grief, dolour, loss, and sorrow is something that science, in fact, has begun to observe with interest and consistency.[14]

14 Three recent articles in the journal *Musicae Scientiae* are illustrative: Henna-Riikka Peltola and Tuomas Eerola, 'Fifty shades of blue: Classification of Music-Evoked Sadness', *Musicae Scientiae* 20 (2016), 84–102; Annemieke J. M. Van den Tol, Jane Edwards, and Nathan A. Heflick, 'Sad Music as a Means for Acceptance-Based Coping', *Musicae Scientiae* 20 (2016), 68–83. See also Olivia Ladinig, Charles

V. Arvo Pärt: A Case Study in Bright Sadness

Books and essays have been written about Arvo Pärt and the particular ways in which he configures loss and hope, desolation and consolation.[15] His compositional trajectory is by now well known. He began in the 1960s as a celebrated composer: first of twelve-tone music, then of collage compositions that jaggedly contrasted passages of alienating atonality with sublime harmony (often quoting Bach verbatim). Over an eight-year period during which he wrote little of significance, he immersed himself in the Franco-Flemish music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and plainchant, seeking another, more pure mode of expression. This led to a decisive move away from serial atonality, away from cluttered complexity, into a new mode of composition. Beginning in 1976, after a series of untexted compositions (*Für Alina*, *Fratres*, *Spiegel im Spiegel*, *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, and *Tabula Rasa*, all of which are among his most enduring) his prolific oeuvre ever since has consisted almost exclusively in settings of sacred text. Plato would be relieved.

(a) The Role of Text

The choice to work with passages of scripture, liturgy, and hagiography bring Pärt's work decisively into what we categorised above as 'sacred music'. But text alone does not make the music spiritually affecting, and that fact is attested by an array of listeners from widely different locations of faith, age, and preferred musical genres. In fact, the explicitly religious texts of Pärt's compositions may if anything be seen as impediments to the spiritual power they exert on those listeners who are indifferent or even hostile to religion. That said, the text plays a critical role in Pärt's oeuvre in two ways. One is by shaping the music. Whether the text is actually sung—as it is in most cases—or 'played' a cappella, Pärt's music reflects every syllable of the text, for example by lengthening accented syllables relative to unaccented syllables, so that

Brooks, Niels Chr. Hansen, and Katelyn Horn David Huron, 'Enjoying Sad Music: A Test of the Prolactin Theory', *Musicae Scientiae* 25 (2021), 429–48.

15 See, for example, Peter C. Bouteneff, *Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence* (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2015), esp. Part III: Bright Sadness.

the music can sound more or less as if the text is spoken. That method is adopted perhaps in the service of comprehensibility—which gives us one clue to the composer's priorities. In all, one can perceive a kind of obedience to the text, where the composer can say, 'The words shape my music', or 'My music is merely a translation of the words'. But that points us to another, more fundamental way in which the text shapes the music, and that is through the composer's love for it. Stemming in turn from his deeply-felt faith, we must remark upon the composer's fidelity (again, obedience) to what the words of scripture, or prayer, are actually saying. Even if the words and their meaning fall upon deaf ears, I would argue that it is that devotion to the text's sacred meaning, together with Pärt's compositional genius, that carries a spiritual force even to the non-religious listener.[16]

(b) The Way of Tintinnabuli

But there is another way in which Pärt's music reaches its listeners with a kind of mystical force. It is a quiet power, because his music tends toward softness and simplicity—more accurately associated with reduction than minimalism. But this is where I return to my thesis that much of the spiritual force of art comes from its empathic character. Again and again, we come across reviews of Pärt's music that highlight how it somehow manages to convey both brokenness and healing, loss and hope, desolation and consolation. We encounter this sentiment in the interview with Björk that I referred to earlier, in the seminal essays and interviews from the 1980s, and in Alex Ross's now iconic 2002 essay in the *New Yorker*.[17] Ross mentions how he keeps hearing stories from different people, about how Pärt's music accompanied their emotional suffering, their physical illness, their journey towards death: 'One or two such anecdotes seem sentimental; a series of them begins to suggest a slightly uncanny phenomenon', he writes. I have heard several of these

16 See my 'The Sound—and Hearing—of Arvo Pärt', in *Arvo Pärt: Sounding the Sacred*, ed. by Peter Bouteneff, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Robert Saler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), pp. 8–21, and my lecture 'Music as Translation: The Movement from Text to Reception in Arvo Pärt's Music', online video recording, *YouTube*, 26 March 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTLAvEWaR1M

17 Alex Ross, 'Consolations: Arvo Pärt', *The New Yorker*, 2 December 2002, https://www.therestisnoise.com/2004/04/arvo_prt_1.html

myself, from people who had never read a word about Pärt or been aware of this apparent phenomenon. Perhaps you have too. Somehow this music fulfils an inner need in those who hurt, grieve, suffer illness, or are near death.

As difficult as it may be to quantify or to explain how Pärt's music achieves that effect, there are some clear connections to be drawn between it and his compositional method. The technical method cannot explain everything, as if you could follow certain instructions and create music that accompanies the suffering, but it shows us that there is something more than just angel dust involved. I will not explain the tintinnabuli method at length, since this has been covered in numerous books and essays, beginning with Paul Hillier's 1987 monograph on Pärt.[18] But the idea lies with two voices that find expression within the music, usually simultaneously. These are, respectively, the melody or 'M' voice, that is drawn on the notes of the diatonic scale, and the triad or 'T' voice, that is constrained to the reigning triad of a given composition's key. Of course, much if not most Western tonal music consists in melodies and triads. It is a matter of how these are combined, and those compositions that follow the tintinnabuli rule strictly (*Für Alina*, *Missa syllabica*, *Passio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem,* for example) allow us to trace each of these two voices very clearly, and see how these compositions both emulate and also transcend the classical Western musical tradition.

And the interesting thing that happens, when you combine these two voices, is the dynamic interplay between consonance and dissonance. Tension and resolution. Minor seconds and major seconds, minor sixths and perfect fifths, etc. Again, most Western tonal music will feature an interplay between consonance and dissonance—it is a matter of deployment. And perhaps the most distinct feature of Pärt's tintinnabuli works is the way in which the triad voice follows relatively jagged lines—fifths, thirds, octaves—where the classical tradition would have trained our ears to look for more stepped gradations between the notes. What we hear, with repeated listening, may be this jagged triad voice, or the stepwise melody voice, but mostly it is the alchemy between the

18 Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). See also Leopold Brauneiss 'Musical Archetypes: The Basic Elements of the Tintinnabuli Style,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, ed. by Andrew Shenton (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 52f.

two that creates the eponymous 'little bell' sonority of tintinnabuli. Such that the two voices ultimately form an indissoluble unity. 1+1=1. This, simply put, is the mechanics behind the magic.

Naturally these formulae and their deployment will not reach everyone the same way—there has been no lack of unimpressed criticism of Pärt (partly in reaction to the rapturous reviews that proliferated during the 1980s). But there is a consensus among those who are drawn to his music that its effect is 'spiritual', that it speaks to barrenness and leaves it with some kind of hope.

The tintinnabuli method can be discerned in its germ form in a few works composed during Pärt's eight-year transition period between serial music and the 1976 breakthrough of *Für Alina.* But once it becomes fully ingrained in Pärt's oeuvre, its effect goes beyond a stylistic gimmick. It becomes subject to qualitative interpretation, by the composer himself, in ways confirmed by his listeners. The overall effect of 'bright sadness' is actually divided among the two voices: the melody is the sadness, the triad is the brightness. How odd this might sound, especially given Pärt's lopsided preference for the minor keys. How, you may ask, is the minor triad a stand-in for 'brightness'? Obviously, it is richer and more complicated than the outward effects of major and minor tonalities. The composer associates the triad and melody voices, respectively, in the following ways:[19]

Melody (M) voice	**Triad (T) voice**
Straying	Stability
Vulnerability	Solidity
Suffering	Consolation
My sins	Forgiveness of my sins
Human	Divine

By the time we reach the last of these pairings we see that the stakes are rather high. But we also perceive the inevitably Christian implications and foundations of this system. The application for formal Christology rests with the confluence of the human and divine, in one 'hypostasis',

19 These pairings derive from the composer's interviews and reflections across decades.

one concrete reality. To get fully Chalcedonian on the matter, the two are never separated or divided, nor are they confused or changed into one another.

But we need not get so theological to make this work. It is the elemental Christian dynamic that is at play, of death-and-resurrection, of redeemed suffering, expressed in Christ's own words, 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12:24). It is the logic of the cross, about which we can sing, in some of our traditions, 'Lo, through the cross, joy has come into the world'. Christian faith is founded on that strange and painful paradox that ultimate gladness and brightness come by way of suffering and even death. In this way, then, the triad voice, even if it is an elemental minor-key triad, is the voice of the 'brightness' in the bright-sadness dynamic. We are not talking about the kind of joy evoked in Movement IV of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. It is more often the subdued but pervasive assurance that death and suffering are not final. 'I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). Christ has broken the world's cycle of pain and death.

Conclusions

By way of conclusion, let us return to Pärt's non-Christian hearers, who may be decidedly uninterested in being preached at with a Christian message. One may only surmise that what is reaching them is not, in any explicit manner, Jesus Christ, his death on the cross, his descent into Hades to harrow it, and his resurrection. Much as non-Christian readers appreciate the Chronicles of Narnia without a Christocentric reading of Aslan, what is reaching them, according to their own accounts, in Pärt's work is the reality of all this that rings true in so much human experience: life is full of pain, suffering, anguish, and evil. And yet, we persevere in the sure hope that this is not *all* there is to life, and perhaps even that goodness ultimately prevails. These intuitions and experiences are fundamentally human, such that in some way, shape, or form they inform all the world' major religious traditions and spiritual teachings. The Psalms are an especially potent example of texts whose spiritual

power rests in their unflinching reflection of pain, suffering, and despair, combined with the ever-present conviction that God overcomes it and redeems it.

But even apart from the implied redemptive message, the music also operates purely at the level of the pain it reflects. For this is what the suffering need from each other, and from their art. Not to be cheered up. Not to be manipulated into happiness, or brought to numbness. But to be heard in their suffering. When we say that art 'reflects' our sorrow, it means that art somehow 'listens' to it. I realize this sounds implausible but it is so. And the best (which is to say the most attuned) art then goes one step further: hearing our pain, it reveals that pain does not have the last word. This, I would argue is so elemental a need, that addresses so fundamental a human reality, that to reflect and address such a need makes music nothing less than *spiritual.*

As clarified above, I have been operating on the supposition that spirituality does not rest primarily with the ethereal, much less with the magical or supernatural. Spirituality may indeed have to do with a 'higher power', with things bigger than ourselves. But if that higher power remains in the heavens, if it does not come down to us, it is of no use to anyone. If its only claim to greatness is its impenetrability, or its mystique, frankly it is not all that great. I find it unhelpful, even potentially damaging, to pit the 'supernatural' against the 'natural', as if our hope lies with escape from the daily stuff of the world. In fact, the best definition of the word 'mystical' does not have to do with esotericism or immateriality. It has to do with lived experience. What we find to be 'spiritual' is located in the deepest centre of our psychosomatic core, where grief and gladness meet. Something that we know deeply but not fully, something we feel but cannot completely explain, and perhaps especially, a gift that we receive that we know ourselves to be unworthy of. If that is what music conveys better than anything else—not in its otherworldliness but precisely in its visceral effect on us—then it is surely the most spiritual of the arts. And Arvo Pärt is one of the composers that shows this to be so.