AN EXAMINATION OF THE COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH IN ARVO PÄRT’S *TE DEUM* AND JOHN TAVENER’S *IKON OF LIGHT*

By

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(under the direction of Mary Leglar)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is to promote an understanding of the aesthetic philosophies and the compositional approach of two contemporary composers, Arvo Pärt and John Tavener. These composers are often associated together for the emphasis they place on spiritual matters and because much of their oeuvre is sacred choral music. Their music has been described as minimalist, as neo-medieval, as simple; and it has received considerable popular acclaim from the general public.

This document presents a review of the literature and an analysis of two representative works: Arvo Pärt’s *Te Deum*, and John Tavener’s *Ikon of Light*. A comparison is then made regarding their compositional approach.

There are discussions in the literature regarding Pärt and Tavener, but there are few substantial studies of their work. This document seeks to examine the techniques and methods of the two composers by examining two substantial works for chorus and string ensemble. The technique of *tintinnabuli* used by Pärt dictates a highly structured and formulaic approach to melody and to rhythm, using a reduced palette of melodic and rhythmic materials. Tavener is more eclectic in his choices; he is attentive to balanced
and symmetrical structures and to the manipulation of sonority and silence for expressive purposes. The clear presentation of the text is of paramount importance to both composers.

While both composers share a similar ethos and religious tradition, their compositions are significantly different. These differences emerge upon a careful examination of *Te Deum* and *Ikon of Light*.

**INDEX WORDS:** Arvo Pärt, John Tavener, *Te Deum*, *Ikon of Light*, 20th century composition, Choral music, Sacred choral music, Orthodox music, Minimalism, Neo-medievalism.
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To Mike, Sarah and Paul

and in memory of Dr. Samuel Ray Burkholder
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I wish to thank the distinguished members of my committee, Mary Leglar, Allen Crowell, William Davis, David Haas, Donald Lowe and Mark Cedel, for their support and encouragement, and for the example of fine scholarship and musical excellence which they set for me throughout my tenure at the University of Georgia.

To my parents, I owe much of what I am today-I take from them a love of scholarship, a love of music and a love of the God who created both.

For the unflagging love and support of my husband, without whom I would not have made this journey; for the patience of my children and for the joy they have brought me throughout this long process.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Two contemporary composers, John Tavener and Arvo Pärt, appear to have turned their backs on the eclecticism and complexity of modern music. Indeed, their works appear to belong to another time; rooted in the ethos and the liturgical traditions of the early church. In its departure from intense complexity, in its rejection of the humanistic for the divine-and the secular for the sacred, the music of Tavener and Part stands in sharp contrast to much of what we know today as 20th Century music.

The choral works of John Tavener and Arvo Part suggest several aspects of aesthetic commonality. Both composers appear to have rejected the Western humanistic tradition of musical composition. They also eschew the principles of musical development and the increasing melodic and rhythmic complexity of 20th century music, occasionally earning for these composers the occasional label of "holy minimalists." The spirituality and simplicity of these pieces have created a public following that has greatly surprised the musical establishment. In fact this very popularity has made the music of Tavener and Part greatly suspect in the eyes of many music critics.

Need for the Study

The numerous speculations and controversies surrounding the work of these two composers suggest a need to synthesize and examine the facts and opinions contained in the literature. Equally important is a careful examination of the composers' philosophies and methods of composition based on a careful analysis of their works, in order to more clearly illustrate the broad statements and judgments found in the literature. To date, such an examination has not been undertaken.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to promote an understanding of the works of John Tavener and Arvo Pärt by (1) exploring the literature pertaining to their aesthetic philosophies and compositional techniques; (2) analyzing representative works; and (3) comparing/contrasting their compositional approaches. Questions for discussion will include:

- Is there evidence of a return to a medieval aesthetic?
- What elements link the two composers and their works and set them apart from other composers who are influenced by sacred traditions?
- Does the music have the validity of craftsmanship, does it have a place among other highly regarded examples of 20th century art music?
- Is Tavener a synthesizer of numerous traditions and influences?
- Is Pärt, in contrast, a composer with a unique style, rejecting all influences and imitating no one?

Limitations

The scope of this document does not allow for an exhaustive examination of the composers’ entire oeuvres. Instead, an analysis of one major work by each composer will serve to illustrate that composer’s unique approach to composition. Pärt’s Te Deum and Tavener’s Ikon of Light were chosen because they share certain important characteristics as summarized below:

- The two works were composed within a few years of one another: Pärt’s Te Deum in 1984-85 (revised in 1992); Tavener’s Ikon of Light in 1982.
- Both are substantial works, of similar length: the Te Deum is 30 minutes long; Ikon of Light, 41 minutes long.
- Both have multiple movements: the Te Deum has 17; Ikon of Light, 7.
- Both display a formulaic and systematic approach to composition
• Both are based on religious texts. The text of Pärt’s Te Deum is taken from a Latin hymn, Tavener’s Ikon of Light is set to Greek Orthodox prayers and both works are linked to Eastern Orthodoxy through the use of an ison (a drone or pedal note found in the Orthodox music tradition).

• Both are predominantly tonal.

• Both are characterized by wide ranges in dynamics and in the vocal parts.

Methodology

The review of the literature will focus on the aesthetic philosophy and compositional techniques of each composer. Material will be gleaned from the composers’ own writings as well as the writings of musicologists and critics.

A nontraditional approach is appropriate for the analysis of the works of Pärt and Tavener, for neither composer includes the functional harmony or melodic development that is typical of most of the music in the Western art music tradition. Carol Whiteman (1992) presents a viable alternative approach in her analysis of Pärt’s Passio. Whiteman’s approach differs from traditional analysis; the traditional foreground elements for music analysis are melody, harmony, rhythm and form; Whiteman’s are text, pitch and duration; and texture, tessitura, and timbre.

This analysis will employ an adaptation of Whiteman’s approach. The foreground elements for the analysis of Arvo Pärt’s Te Deum will be text, duration, and form; pitch (horizontal and vertical implications), and timbre, tessitura and texture. The rational for this choice of approaches is as follows:

Text, duration, and form. Pärt begins with a single word. To longer words he assigns short and long note values according to the natural syllabic stress of the word. He uses a similar system with short phrases or words. He begins a new movement at the beginning of a new verse
or thought. The through-composed work simply unfolds along with each new phrase of text (each phrase is sung first as a chant, then provided with a polyphonic response). The analysis will reveal Pärt’s formula for determining duration from the text. Only the instrumental passages are set in regular meter (6/4) and on occasion, resemble independent accompanying figures.

Pitch. The linear progression of pitches is the most important element in the *Te Deum*. Using predetermined pitches, Pärt employs a highly organized method for establishing the melody, or the M-voice (M stands for the “Melody” voice), the M-voice material then determines the pitches in the accompanying T-voice (T stands for “Tintinnabuli” and represents the voice which sings members of a D-minor triad). This two-voice framework is called “tintinnabuli” and is applied to both the vocal and instrumental parts in *Te Deum*. Texture is varied by the addition and subtraction of pairs of voices. Barring a brief exception in the last movement, there is no repetition, only constant variation. Although there are vertical implications, Pärt uses a simple linear approach to composition in *Te Deum*.

*Timbre, tessitura, and texture* are used to provide contrast, variety, and expressiveness in the work.

The foreground elements chosen for John Tavener’s *Ikon of Light* are text and form, pitch, and sonority and silence.

*Text and form*. Tavener has taken a long medieval text (“Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit,” by Greek mystic St. Simeon the Theologian [942-1022 A.D.]) and added other materials to create a balanced, formal block structure. This large palindromic form has become a signature structure of Tavener’s. He uses repetition and melodic materials in a cyclic way between the different movements.
Pitch. A serial approach to melody is employed in *Ikon of Light*. Portions of the work are composed using a “magic square,” in which a grid is created from the letters of a Latin phrase and these letters are then assigned corresponding pitches. While much of the work is serially derived, the effect is that of spontaneous Byzantine chant. Other movements are tightly constructed around pitch class sets, resulting in highly dissonant blocks of sound.

Sonority and silence. There is an almost complete lack of rhythmic interest in this work. There is also an absence of harmonic progression, of tension and release. Despite this, *Ikon of Light* is highly dramatic. Tavener has replaced these traditional musical elements with a heightened emphasis on sonority. He uses regular periods of silence to delineate the timbres and textures even more effectively.

The analyses will be presented in the form of verbal description and appropriate charts and musical examples.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Neither Arvo Pärt nor John Tavener has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. A number of relatively short articles address the work of one or both of these composers, but in-depth, analytical discussions of the music itself rarely appear. Smith’s (1999) assessment of the literature on Pärt could also be applied to research on Tavener: “[H]is work is carelessly dismissed as fashionable, neo-medieval short cut to quasi-enlightenment and has attracted relatively little serious musicological study” (p. 19). More than half of the studies reviewed in this document are devoted almost entirely to the spiritual and philosophical background of the composition being discussed; the actual compositions often receive only passing comment.

On the other hand, performances and recordings of the composers’ works have enjoyed an enthusiastic popular reception. Ratcliffe (2000) says of Tavener’s music: “[T]he metaphysical concepts of his work reach out to a large listening public. There are not many contemporary composers who can fill St. Paul’s Cathedral for a concert” (p. 42). This popular regard for the compositions of Pärt and Tavener has resulted in provocative reviews, considerable press coverage, and readily available recordings. Liner notes and published interviews with the composers thus have provided a relatively large collection of primary sources.

The remainder of this introduction to the review of the literature will summarize and compare the available resources on each composer. Following these summaries, the main body of the review will discuss and critique the literature in terms of two major categories: the philosophical foundations on which Pärt and Tavener base their compositional approaches and
the ways in which those philosophical frameworks are expressed in the choral music of the two composers.

Philosophy and Work of Arvo Pärt

The work of Arvo Pärt has generally been approached from a more analytical point of view than has that of Tavener, perhaps because Pärt’s compositional systems lend themselves more readily to verbal description. Also in contrast to Tavener, who has drawn attention chiefly from scholars in his native England, Pärt—a native of Estonia who has lived in Berlin for some years—has been the subject of articles in German, Dutch, East European and English journals.

Of the several doctoral dissertations devoted to Pärt’s work, only one pertinent to this discussion is Carol Whiteman’s *The Iconography of Arvo Pärt* (1997). Thomas Holm (1998) provides an analysis of three choral works by Pärt. Other academic documents focus on Pärt’s instrumental opus.

Paul Hillier’s book, *Arvo Pärt* (1997), contains a biographical, philosophical, and analytical treatment of Pärt, his tintinnabuli style, and of selected works. Hillier, music scholar, singer and director of the Hilliard Ensemble, has collaborated closely with Pärt on a number of premieres, performances and recordings. This rich association with Pärt lends authority to Hillier’s view both of the composer’s philosophy and of his music.

In general, however, as Nora Pärt contends, “very little of [the literature on her husband’s work] is musicologically-founded. In effect, almost nothing. This deficit in musicological methodology is always smoothed over by biographical or personal information which cannot necessarily be linked to Arvo’s music directly” (Smith, 1999, p. 21). This document will attempt to remedy the deficit of which Nora Pärt spoke.
Philosophy and Work of John Tavener

Fortunately for scholars interested in Tavener, the composer has written at some length about his own philosophy and music. In addition to letters, interviews, and articles, he has written two books that shed light on his compositional approach and the philosophy from which it developed. In addition, he has collaborated with many English conductors, both in performances and in recordings. These close collaborations make the resulting recordings and liner notes, many of which are written by the conductor and/or Tavener himself, especially valuable.

Also valuable to a study of Tavener is Geoffrey Haydon’s 1995 biography of the composer, entitled *Glimpses of Paradise*. Haydon provides an account of the composer’s colorful life as well as a discussion of the events surrounding many of the compositions. However, musical analysis is not the focus of this book and the author makes no attempt to appraise Tavener’s œuvre. He does describe the compositional process used in several of Tavener’s major works.

A search of *Dissertation Abstracts International* produced only two doctoral dissertations on the music of Tavener. The first, *An Analysis of Six Major Choral Works By John Tavener* by Larry Parsons (University of Illinois, 1978) is outdated for the purposes of the present investigation. The second, *John Tavener’s “The Protecting Veil”* by Elaine Marie Anderson (The University of Alabama, 1999) focuses on Tavener’s instrumental work and thus is not directly germane to the topic of this document. Tavener’s work is also discussed in a limited number of master’s theses completed at English academic institutions. Articles on Tavener have appeared almost exclusively in English journals; thus far Tavener has not attracted as much
attention from scholars outside Britain as has Arvo Pärt, whose residence in Berlin has given his music a wider exposure on the continent.

In general, writers who examine the work of Tavener dwell on his religious views, his rejection of modernism, and the “unusual” effects found in some of his music. Systematic analyses of his work are conspicuously absent from the literature.

In summary, the scholarship on Pärt and Tavener shows certain commonalities. The most important of these, from the point of view of the present study, is that attention has been concentrated on background aspects such as biography, religion, and philosophy. Less has been done with respect to analyzing the actual music, and still very few attempts have been made to present a musical analysis grounded in the composer’s philosophical approaches.

The following discussion will first address the literature on the philosophical foundations on which Pärt and Tavener base their motivation as composers. Foremost is their commitment to specific religious traditions and to a spiritual dimension in the compositional process. This orientation is evident in their interest in chant, iconography, hesychasm, and ritual, as well as in their choice of text.

The second section of the literature review will focus on the compositional approaches of Pärt and Tavener. Rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, textural and formal implications will be examined as well as the composer’s working habits. This will be followed by a critical discussion of some of the labels that various writers assign to the composer and their works: “minimalist,” “new simplicity” and “postmodernism.”
Philosophical and Aesthetic Basis to the Work of Pärt and Tavener

The majority of the studies of both Pärt and Tavener examine the spiritual and aesthetic traditions within which they approach the composition process.

Religious Roots

Pärt and Tavener both share a deep commitment to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Both men made this commitment in the late 1970’s, after they had each established careers as composers. Pärt is an adherent of the Russian Orthodox Church, as is Tavener; the latter, however, finds much of his inspiration in the Greek Orthodox/Byzantine tradition (Tavener, 1999, p. 33, Hillier, 1997, p. 32). Both composers have affirmed the centrality of their faith and its relation to their music (Tavener, 1995, p. 49 and McCarthy, 1989).

Hillert (1996) considers Pärt “one of the most compelling composers of religious music in our time... when his music is played, he (Pärt) asks himself if it is pleasing to God” (p.19).

Tavener has repeatedly stressed the connection between his faith and his art (e.g., Tavener 1995, 1999). For Tavener, “Music is to glorify God. That’s all” (Tavener, 1999, p.131).

Among the facets of the eastern Orthodox tradition mentioned in the literature as being important to both Pärt and Tavener are iconography, hesychasm, ritual, and sacred text.

Iconography. Ikons are images or visual representations of Christ, the Virgin Mary, angels or saints. In the Orthodox tradition, ikons are believed to possess sacramental grace and believed to confer grace on the believer. An important symbolic element central to Orthodox worship, they play a mediatory role between God and the worshipper providing “a way in, a point of meeting, a place of encounter”(McManners, 1990, pp.142-143). They are not expressions of individual creativity, or holy pictures, or objects of superstition; they are the “representation of the reality” (Thekla/Tavener, 1994, p. 28).
The chief sources for the relationship between ikons and the compositional framework of Arvo Pärt are Whiteman (1997) and Hillier (1997). In a dissertation focusing on an analysis of Pärt’s *Passio*, Whiteman (1997) characterizes ikons as “visual objects of worship, created with rigid and precise rules of proportion, placement, color, subject, and materials, and profound spiritual inspiration” (p.7). She finds parallels to these elements in the tintinnabuli style of Pärt, specifically in *Passio*. Not only does Pärt, like the ikon painters, work within a framework of tightly organized formulas for pitch, rhythm, timbre, and texture, Whiteman identifies in him an unswerving commitment to seeking divine inspiration in all that he does (pp.35-36). Pärt “deliberately subverts the events of the narrative in order to create a work of contemplation and veneration, much as the icon painters of the Orthodox Church would prepare and create visual ikons (Whiteman, 1997, Abstract). Whiteman also finds evidence of symbolism in the structure, voicing, and pitch centers of the *Passio*, drawing a parallel between this and the symbolism of the ikon of the crucifixion. Although her analysis is intriguing and plausible, she presents no evidence that Pärt himself had any intention of creating an aural version of the ikon of the crucifixion.

The term ‘sounding ikon,’ is used by Paul Hillier in describing Arvo Pärt’s music; and it is defined as “a meeting point between man and God”(Hillier, 1996, p. 17). Paul Hillier discusses the ikon tradition, “not as an ‘explanation’ of Pärt’s music, but as a potentially useful corollary of it” (Hillier, 1997, p. 3). According to Hillier (1997), it is in the sense of conforming to a tradition and of working with given elements, the content and disposition of which lie beyond the particular whim and character of the artist-composer, that draws the connection between the iconic tradition and the work of Arvo Pärt (p. 4). Bradshaw (1995), however, makes a distinction between ikons and Pärt’s music, “Pärt contrives to suggest that his work is a focus more for contemplative devotion (an act in which the composer places himself as participating congregant) than for iconic worship,” but, as Bradshaw admits, “nothing is quite that simple when it comes to the underlying inventiveness of Pärt’s liturgical settings” (p. 442).
Among the most important sources of discussions of iconography in Tavener’s work are statements by the composer himself, in both published writings and in interviews. Tavener works within the framework of Russian, Byzantine and Coptic “tones” (Tavener, 1999, p.135-138). He considers the ikon “a ‘window on Heaven’, a contemplative force that concentrates the mind of the worshipper.” (Burn, 1992). He describes his chamber opera, Mary of Egypt as a ‘moving ikon.’ (Ford, 1993, p.94). According to the liner notes to We Shall See Him, “Tavener creates a score of idiosyncratic timbres for each principal idea, a process which may be likened to the different mozaics or paints that make up the colours of an ikon.” (Burn, 1992). It is important to Tavener that ikons are completely unromantic and completely unemotional (Tavener/Stewart, 1992, p. 28). The lack of dynamic interest in Tavener’s work has also been connected with iconography. Trendell (1996) contends:

[I]f you accuse it of being static, then you have to recognize its iconic quality-just as an icon in an Orthodox church is less a picture and more an act of devotion, drawing the onlooker into a state of contemplation, so might Tavener describe his music, and its static nature is essential to this. (p. 41)

_Hesychasm_. The vague terms _mysticism_ and _contemplation_ are often used in discussing the music of Pärt and Tavener. A more precise term is “hesychasm,” which refers to a specific practice central to the tradition of the Eastern Church. The hesychast tradition implies stillness, silence, tranquillity and a fixed concentration. Hesychasm is a form of contemplation approached by an attitude of listening to God (Hillier, 1997, p. 8), which finds no exact parallel in Western church traditions.

The hesychast tradition is central to both Pärt (Hillier, 1997, p. 7; Whiteman, 1997, p. 35) and Tavener (1999, p. 120). Tavener in particular has made a careful study of the writings of Orthodox mystics, and he has created musical settings of many of their prayers and poems. While he does not use the term _hesychasm_, he draws a crucial distinction between Western and
Eastern mystical orientations: “[t]he Western Church turns to the world, whereas the Orthodox Church always turns toward heaven” (Tavener, 1999, p. 128). According to Moody, Tavener aspires to the Orthodox condition for real prayer, the concept of “the mind entering the heart” (p. 66).

**Ritual.** Another element of religious practice often found in discussion of Pärt and Tavener is ritual. The term is used loosely to refer to works that include the repetition of certain phrases; works that use religious texts, or that simply create a ‘religious’ atmosphere. Hillier (1997) is more precise, “To the religious initiate, the words of a ritual are not symbols of a greater reality, but actually possess and are possessed by the thing they name” (p. 79). Moody (1987) identifies a strong ritual element in the music of both composers: “One participates in such music in the same way that one would participate in a religious ritual” (p. 28). According to Moody (1996), the element of ecstatic repetition is a decidedly eastern concept and that repetition and ‘hypnotic incantation’ have a place both in the music of Pärt and Tavener and in the liturgical rhythm of the Orthodox Church (p. 78). A straightforward example of ritual repetition can be found in John Tavener’s *Ultimos Ritos* in which the name of Jesus is chanted in a variety of languages, or in Arvo Pärt’s *Credo* in which the choir repeats the text “credo” and “Jesum Christum” numerous times.

This focus on the name of Jesus is at the heart of Orthodox worship: for example, the faithful repeat the “Jesus Prayer” (“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”) over and over again, almost as a drone, as a ritualistic prayer of contemplation. Tavener has used this prayer more than once in his compositions, and his *Prayer for the World* is a seventy-minute setting of this simple prayer (Griffiths, 1985, p. 109). Wright (1994) finds in Tavener's *Ikon of...*
Light: “the reassuring presence of ritual elements, such as the drones underpinning chant-like lines and the parallel harmonies they generate” (p. 393).

Although Pärt rarely uses literal repetition of text, Hillier (1997) contends that his music remains ritualistic:

“The ritual aspect of his music derives both aesthetically and spiritually from its function as a sounding icon. The music ushers us into the presence of a recurring process: for ritual is not simply the repetition or re-enactment of structured events, but rather a return to a perennial condition.” (p. 17-18)

Text. One result of this intense involvement with the spiritual is the importance of sacred texts in the compositions of Pärt and Tavener. “Tavener has always needed words to inspire him—he has written almost no abstract music - but his texts have increasingly come either from the Orthodox Church or from Greek love poetry” (Phillips, 1984, p. 384). For Pärt, although he has also written a considerable amount of instrumental music, “words have remained the source of almost all his most significant works since [Pärt’s return to Orthodoxy]” (Hillier, 1997, p. 80). Both Pärt and Tavener draw their texts from not only the Eastern but also the Western religious traditions. Tavener often uses multiple language texts- in *Akathist for Thanksgiving*, for example, the refrain is Church Slavonic, while the verses are in English translation. Many of his smaller choral works are based on English sacred poetry. Pärt, although a native Estonian, has embraced the more universally understood Latin settings of scripture and of the Roman liturgy. He, too, has set a Church Slavonic text (“Canon of Repentence”) to music in *Kanon Pokajanen* (1997).

Medieval Aesthetic

Sources have linked the work of Pärt and Tavener to the following elements of the medieval aesthetic: chant and polyphony, the subjugation of the personal, the use of symbolism, and the use of melodic and rhythmic formulas.

*Chant and Polyphony:* Almost all sources cited relate the music of Pärt and Tavener to some element of chant, which represents the aesthetic of the medieval world. Tatarkiewicz’s (1970) description of Gregorian chant articulates characteristics of Gregorian chant that invite
such comparisons:

“Not only musical effects, but also progress were renounced. It remained faithful to its canons, from which no deviation was tolerated. Its simplicity limited its possibilities from the start. For this reason it became, as it were, a timeless music, incapable of development.” (p. 74)

Pärt and Tavener’s intense commitment to text reveals another link between their work and the chant tradition. Chant is “fundamentally functional music” and “its duty is to beautify and adorn the worship of God in the context of liturgy” (Wilson, p. 36).

Hillert describes Pärt’s choral music as “subtly modeled on the chant styles of the venerable musico-liturgical traditions of both the Eastern and Western Church” (Hillert, 1996, p. 21). Pärt’s ‘tintinnabuli’ style (described more fully later in this document) emerged after he had spent years immersed in a study of chant and early polyphony. Hillier (1997) says that the similarity of Pärt’s approach and the chant “is not of quotation, but of a certain melodic sensibility… which, viewed as a whole, is satisfyingly balanced and expressively refined”(p. 79). Hillier (1997) finds ready parallels between the polyphony of Pärt’s tintinnabuli works and the early polyphony of the Notre Dame school (most notably the composer, Perotin) (pp. 82-84). He identifies striking aural and visual similarities between Perotin’s Viderunt Omnes and Pärt’s An den Wassern.

The Subjugation of the Personal. An echo of medieval philosophies and religious sensibilities can be found in the insistence of both composers on the subjugation of the individual, and in their tendency to adopt a more detached or objective quality of expression. Wilfred Mellers describes this quality of objectivity in the notes to Pärt’s album, Arbos, “[T]he music does not attempt directly to illustrate or even express the words: in which it resembles medieval music” (Mellers, 1987). Hillier (1989) reflects on another aspect of this ‘objectivity,’
in Pärt’s music: “Each phrase must “live”…Gregorian chant and early polyphony must live in the same way-fervently, not overtly as an extension of the performer’s persona, but from an inner state of heedfulness (p. 137).

Several writers (e.g. Moody, 1996, p. 69) note the lack of text painting in the works of both Pärt and Tavener. Tavener “is not a song writer who paints in music each tiny detail of the words. He is a philosopher who tries to paint the universal idea inherent in the text” (Parsons, 1978). Hillert (1996) describes Pärt’s setting, The Beatitudes in this way: “There is no pomposity, no attempt at “text-painting” in the symbolic Baroque or literal Romantic sense. Yet in every repetitive phrase the music pursues a clear uncomplicated, logical course” (p. 24).

Symbolism. Another aspect of the medieval aesthetic that characterizes the work of Pärt and Tavener is symbolism. Both attribute a religious or mystical significance to many musical elements including pitch, voice part, and scale. Moody (1996) attempts to explain their approach:

Symbols are a way of mediating between the composer’s interior world and the public to which his music will be exposed, and they are a way of imposing some order upon something (mysticism) which it is extraordinarily difficult to come to terms with in music (because it is so imprecise), and correspondingly difficulty to present. (pp. 78-79)

In Pärt’s tintinnabuli compositions, each voice has a symbolic significance. As the composer himself explains:

The M-voice always signifies the subjective world, the daily egoistic life of sin and suffering; the T-voice, meanwhile, is the objective realm of forgiveness…the eternal dualism of body and spirit, earth and heaven; but the two voices are in reality one voice, a twofold single entity. (Hillier, 1997, p. 96)

It should be noted, however, that Pärt’s wife, Nora, insists that her husband’s music can speak for itself” (Smith 1999, p. 22), “Naturally, you can always connect ideas –biographical or not-with Arvo’s music. Yet the meaning of the music is purely musical. Arvo is predominantly
concerned with musical forms and structure” (Smith 1999, p. 21).

       Tavener, however, in a 1999 interview, seems to echo Pärt’s insistence on signification: “There has to be a metaphysical explanation to every harmony, every rhythm. So nothing can be humanly fabricated” (Anderson, 1999, p. 34).

       The Use of Melodic and Rhythmic Formulas. The music of each composer has a characteristic and often-noted feature that make clear that composer’s links to medieval music: the use of a framework of tightly organized formulas for pitch, rhythm, timbre, and texture.

       In creating his tintinnabuli effect, Arvo Pärt operates from a highly organized set of melodic and rhythmic formulas (Hillier, 1997, p. 90). In his Miserere, he uses a favorite medieval device, the mensuration canon (Schenbeck, 1993, p. 25). Part stated in an interview, “everything in the world is numerically arranged in one way or another” (McCarthy, 1989, p. 133). In another interview he spoke of a geometric starting point of any landscape, enlarged under a microscope a million-fold, describing geometry as the point where everything begins, he likened it to a mathematical formula (Smith, 1999, p. 20).

       Tavener’s interest in numerical formulas is manifested in his use Byzantine modes and their corresponding melodic formulas, and in his fondness for the magic square (Crowthers, 1994, p. 14). The palindrome is one of his favorite forms, because it represents the Trinity (Crowthers, 1994, pp. 12-13). He attaches great importance to the drone note or ison of the Byzantine music tradition, for that pitch traditionally represents eternity. For Tavener, the ison also represents the presence of God, the silence of God and the silence of eternity (Tavener, 1999, p. 154).

       Literature on the Compositional Approach of Pärt and Tavener

       Writers reviewing the choral music of Pärt and Tavener have pointed to many musical
elements in these 20th-century works that draw inspiration from, or are influenced by, the ancient traditions of the church and more specifically, Gregorian chant. If the purpose of chant is to provide a clear vehicle for an all-important text, then Pärt and Tavener reflect this objective by using simple melodies and rhythms that emerge from the spoken word. Both composers deliberately strive toward simplicity in their compositional approach, a characteristic especially evident in the absence of harmonic and rhythmic complexity. In their numerous settings for vocal forces (often unaccompanied), Pärt and Tavener reveal a propensity for the linear.

The compositional elements discussed in the literature are as follows: rhythm, tempo, silence, melody, harmony, form, timbre/sonority and expression/style.

*Rhythm*: Little has been written about the treatment of rhythm in the works of Tavener and Pärt, although there are brief discussions of rhythm in the analyses of Pärt’s larger works (e.g. Whiteman, 1997 and Hillier, 1989). It is however, possible to glean some general statements from the literature about the rhythmic treatment in Pärt and Tavener’s music.

It is difficult to separate rhythm from text in this music. Both of the composers have returned to a chant-like technique in which the rhythm is almost solely determined by the syllabic emphasis of the words themselves (Simon, 1996, p. 21). Words such as “choral chant” and “choral recitative” are used to describe this approach (Milsom, 1994, p. 4). Hillier explains that Pärt uses a primarily syllabic (one note per syllable) treatment of the text. Pärt employs some neumatic (two or three notes per syllable) textures, and occasionally a word or phrase is set melismatically (many notes for one syllable), for ornamental or expressive effect (Hillier, 1997, p. 80). When there is more than one voice present, the term ‘homorhythmic’ is an apt description of Pärt and Tavener’s approach, although Hillier uses the term only to describe the tintinnabuli technique of Arvo Pärt (Hillier, 1997, p. 90).
Both Tavener and Pärt have voiced their rejection of complexity (Crowthers, 1994, p. 11 and McCarthy, 1989, p. 131) and it is assumed in this review that Pärt and Tavener would include rhythmic complexity in these sentiments. Although the writers do not specifically address Tavener’s approach, clues may be taken from the close relation of his music to Byzantine chant traditions.

David Clarke describes Pärt’s music as containing a “limited rhythmic vocabulary” (Clarke, 1993, p. 680). Although this may be true, he has a highly structured approach to rhythm. In much of Pärt’s music, the rhythms are carefully formulated, based on patterns determined by the number of syllables in either words or phrases (Hillier, 1997, p. 127). Whiteman (1997) describes Pärt’s use of specific durations for the different characters in Passio, and the way in which he determines the rhythms for each voice using formulas based on the numbers of syllables in each word, and on the number of words in a phrase (pp. 91-93). In Passio, each word is divided by a bar line (Simon, 1996, p. 21) and Pärt also sets many of his texts in phrases composed of notes of equal length, inserting longer note values on the last syllable of each phrase (Hillier, 1989, p. 135). Paul Hillier elaborates on these ideas, observing that when Pärt sets English texts, which are abundant in monosyllables, he uses whole phrases in his melodic planning. This is in contrast to the individual words that are set so carefully in his settings of Latin, German and Church Slavonic (Hillier, 1998). There is no reference to the use of rhythmic formulae in the compositions of Tavener.

*Tempo and Silence:* Some writers have noted the frequent use of slow or moderate tempi that are sustained for long periods of time in many Tavener and Pärt works. This lack of rhythmic motion is compounded by the incorporation of silence, an important compositional element for both Tavener and Pärt. The silence is sometimes notated by rests, at other times by a specific
number of seconds. Tavener’s use of simple rhythmic units combined with “breathing spaces” between phrases creates an impact of freedom from time and meter, resulting in a sense of extreme simplicity and stillness (Moody & Phillips, 1987, p. 12). Hillier suggest that silence has become a creative element for Pärt (Hillier, 1997, p. 199) and that this use of silence creates a distinctive and characteristic trait in the Pärt “sound.” According to Hillier:

All music emerges from silence, to which sooner or later it must return…How we live depends on our relationship with death; how we make music depends on our relationship with silence. Arvo Pärt’s music accepts silence and death, and thus reaffirms the basic truth of life, its frailty compassionately realized, its sacred beauty observed and celebrated. (Hillier, 1989, p. 134)

Pärt states, “Music must be conceived as the relationship between sounds and the silence that surrounds them.” (Hillier, 1989, p. 134) and asks, “How can one fill the time with notes worthy of the preceding silence?” (Elste, 1988, p. 337).

For those listening, the absence of rhythmic complexity, the slow tempi and the use of silence may elicit, at best, a sense of stasis (Burns, 1992, p. 3); at worst, a response perilously close to boredom (Clark, 1992, p. 682).

Melody. The writers reviewed agree that the melodies of Pärt and Tavener are tonal, and that they are tonal in a modal sense, owing to a distinct lack of twentieth century chromaticism and the rare use of modulation. Hillier compares Pärt’s music to the minimalist trait of ‘non-functional tonality’ (Hillier, 1997, p. 15). Tavener bases much of his composition on the tones of the Russian, Byzantine and Coptic traditions (Ford, 1993, p. 95) and his music is often described as similar to Byzantine chant (Moody & Phillips, 1987, p. 15). Ivan Moody (1996) praises Tavener’s “melodic luxuriance” (p. 69) and “…his often overlooked exuberant lyricism” (2001, p. 129).

Both composers create melodies which have been horizontally conceived and which are often described as accessible and inherently vocal (Schenbeck, 1993, p. 27). They flow, step-wise or in simple intervallic ratios, in constantly undulating lines.

Moody and Phillips (1987) describe Tavener’s composition in this way, “the use of
simple melodic and harmonic fragments in close proximity to or in combination with their
inversions” (p. 11). Generally the melodies remain within a narrow range without wide skips or
angular motion. It is important to note that there is no attempt made at melodic development in
lack of melodic development in Pärt’s music by saying,

Classical tonal elements are made to resist participation in their associated systems of
meaning - such as functional harmony or unfolding musical argument - through a number
of devices, among them mensuration canon, isorhythm, quasi-serial manipulation or
permutation of note sequences and principles of strict symmetry.” (p. 682)

He goes a step further by stating that these elements “all serve to defamiliarise the
well known domain of the diatonic” (p. 682).

From Hillier we learn that Pärt’s music, while chant-like, is nevertheless not based on
pre-existing chant, but is instead derived from tiny cells of pitches, moving away from and back
toward a tonal center in an undulating and often stepwise motion. Pärt has developed a radical
approach to tonality by implementing a technique incorporating complex formulae known as
“tintinnabuli” (Hillier, 1997, p. 86). This term refers to the ringing of a bell and, more
specifically, to the aural consequences of the overtones heard in the ringing of Eastern Orthodox
Church bells (Whiteman, 1997, p. 16-20).

Paul Hillier describes Pärt’s odyssey. During the 1970’s, after years of composing with
modern serial techniques, Pärt withdrew from composition to make an exhaustive study of chant
and early polyphony. He emerged at the end of that decade with a new approach to composition
in which he reduced all elements to two voices: one derived from the triad and the other derived
from a scale (usually no more than a tetrachord). Pärt assigns the melody voice (or ‘M’-voice)
with a scalar melody that is often modal in implication (no chromaticism or modulations). The
tintinnabuli, or ‘T’-voice, operates as a pair to the M- voice, working its way through the
permutations of a single triad. Hillier describes the T-voice in this way, “the harmonic framework has been tilted sideways to form a musical line” (Hillier, 1997, p. 90). The constant presence of the triad combines with the M-voice, creating dissonances around it like a halo. This calls to mind the sound of bells and evokes a tremendously stable and insistent tonality. Bryars says of tintinnabuli, “[T]he gradual unfolding of patterns implicit in the sound itself, and the idea of a sound that is simultaneously static and in flux” (Bryars, 1992, p. 729). Hillier elaborates on Pärt’s approach, “Furthermore, the entire structure of a tintinnabuli work is predetermined either by some numerical pattern or by the syntax and prosody of a chosen text. Very often these two ideals are combined” (Hillier, 2001, p. 165). Whiteman (1997) provides a good description of the aural properties of Western and Eastern church bells, a discussion that illuminates not just Pärt’s sound world which could not be measured, as it were, in kilometres, or even metres, but tintinnabuli technique, but Tavener’s music as well.

Pärt describes his motivation,

The concept of tintinnabuli was born from a deeply rooted desire for an extremely reduced only in millimetres. According to my experience, the listener becomes increasingly sensitized in the process once he is drawn into this dimension. By the end the listening attention is utterly focused. (Smith, 1999, p. 22)

He further clarifies the relationship between tintinnabuli’s numerical formulas and the role of intuition in an interview with James McCarthy. McCarthy asks, “Do you feel there is any contradiction between these principles and your intuitive approach to music?” Pärt replies,

I don’t see it as a contradiction, since everything in the world is numerically arranged in one way or another. There are definite rules everywhere – it has to be so. But my principle is that they must not be the most important part of the music. They must be simple – they fall away and are only a skeleton. Life arises from other things.” (McCarthy, 1989, p. 133)

According to Hillier, an interesting effect resulting from the constantly undulating triad and frequently sounding tonic in the M-voice is that of a drone (1989, p.134). While Pärt’s
drone is usually implied (sometimes it is notated as an instrumental part), Tavener often incorporates a drone in the bass voice, continuing the tradition of the Byzantine and Russian ison. The ison may be described as a bass drone representing the ‘eternity’ note (Crowthers, 1994, pp. 12-13).

Repetition of melodic material often results from the repetition of texts. While Tavener uses literal melodic repetition frequently, Potter (1998) describes Pärt’s approach to repetition in this discussion of Passio, “One cannot always be sure whether one is hearing literal repetition of material or variation of it” (p. 252). Examination of the score reveals constant but subtle variation. Wilfrid Mellers describes this subtle variation quality as “heterophony” (1987). ¹ Pärt has only begun to include repetition in his tintinnabuli technique in recent compositions (Bradshaw, 1995, p. 443).

Harmony. In the music of Pärt and Tavener, harmonic progression, as found in the common practice tradition, rarely occurs. This subsequently eliminates the fundamental qualities of tension and release found in much of Western music. As the word linear is found frequently in discussions of the music of both Pärt and Tavener, it becomes clear that an interest in melodic line and (especially in Tavener’s case) in sonority itself has in some ways replaced the traditional role of harmony in composition (Burn, 1992). Malcolm Miller (1994, p. 61) describes how Tavener frequently uses parallel harmonies (often in inversions) to accompany the chant-like upper voice, resulting in a thick texture in the lower voices. Tavener adopts this technique of “choral recitative” from the Russian liturgical tradition but he also finds influences far closer to home. Richard Smith (1992) remarks on the Anglican musical tradition found in Tavener’s music; “[I]t alternates, as is Tavener’s way, between the powdery thirds of Anglican Church music, and the inflections of Byzantium” (p. 475).

¹ The term “heterophony” is more traditionally used to describe an improvisational form of polyphony that implies the simultaneous use of modified versions of the same melody. (Harvard Dictionary of Music, 1972, p.383)
Pärt’s departure from functional harmony is described by Hillier:

Pärt seems to have felt that the powerful force exerted by tonality in its simplest triadic state (and not, that is to say, as a revival of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century functional tonality) was a musico-acoustic fact which he should no longer avoid, and that only by entering its world completely could he now create a music of essentials, a music of few notes, but great strength and purity. (Hillier, 1997, p. 92)

It has already been said that Pärt and Tavener use modulations and chromaticism sparingly. Because of the modal quality found in so much of this music, dissonances usually appear no more jarring than those heard in medieval polyphony (except when Tavener uses tone clusters for specific effect as in “fos” in *Ikon of Light*). Clarke describes Pärt’s approach this way, “These independent linear elements generate quite striking sonorities which have nothing to do with functional triadic harmony, demonstrating instead a state of emancipated diatonic dissonance” (Clarke, 1993, p. 682). Hillier (1997) elaborates on this concept and maintains that Pärt, in creating a T-voice, is now presenting the triad horizontally instead of vertically. In fact, harmony may be a meaningless term for the “tintinnabuli” approach if one heeds Paul Hillier’s description of the two voices as “two sides of one coin, a tonality that can be expressed both horizontally and vertically” (p. 91). Pärt does not distinguish between melody and harmony: “The vertical and the horizontal aspects [of early music and of his tintinnabuli works] are inseparable. They are not abstract entities. There is a reason for relating both together” (Smith 1999, p. 24). Of Pärt’s *Passio*, Susan Bradshaw remarks, “Harmonically speaking, this is of course a totally closed word, and one which not all will choose (or will have the patience) to enter” (Bradshaw, 1995, p. 443).

*Form.* The previous discussion may lead the reader to believe that in all of this simplicity there exists no plan. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is important to note that Tavener and Pärt both composed serially for some years as young composers. Even after eschewing the
complexities of the 12-tone system, they have continued to use numerical formulas for their melodic and rhythmic figures. A fondness for symmetry is evident in the work of Tavener (Moody and Phillips, 1987, p. 15) and is an inevitable result of Pärt’s highly structured compositions. “Pärt has always demonstrated a need for the constraints of structure, not through lack of invention but from the threat of an excess of it” (Hillier, 1997, p. 86). Allen Simon (1986) describes Pärt’s compositional approach as “deterministic,” which “refers to a process by which the manipulation of musical elements (pitches, rhythms, harmonies, textures, dynamics, etc.) is determined by formulas or predictable sequences” (Simon, 1996, p. 21). Pärt is referred to as a serial composer by Andrew Gant (2000, p. 31).

Tavener has a special fondness for retrograde motion, for inversions (Moody, Phillips, 1987, p. 11) and palindromic devices (Haydon, 1995). In an interview Tavener described the symbolism behind the palindrome, “[I]n my beginning is my end,” and “…music, in the deepest sense of sacred tradition, is an act of remembrance, remembrance of a paradise lost towards which all artists concerned with the sacred must aspire” (Crowthers, 1994, p. 10, p. 14). Symbolism aside, the palindrome provides much-needed cohesiveness to Tavener’s large block structures (Moody & Phillips, 1987, p. 11). Repetition becomes another organizing force in much of Tavener’s music. It is often described as ritualistic, because he selects sacred texts that necessitate the use of repeated phrases. These repeated phrases, interspersed throughout a work also provide a certain formal cohesiveness. Jon Parales (2000, p. 5) echoes several writers in using the term ‘antiphonal’ to describe one of Tavener’s favorite textures.

Neither composer appears to be motivated to use traditional musical forms (i.e. sonata, song form, fugue) or abstract structures. The formal structures emerge from the text itself. Bamberger represents Tavener’s view by saying, “With his esteem for the medieval
concept of craft, of music to accompany life’s rituals, Tavener has become increasingly ill-disposed to abstract music” (Bamberger, 1999, p. 12). This lack of formal development, and the lack of points of climax and repose usually found in western music contribute to a quality of stasis (Clarke, 1993, p. 682). Tavener himself says,

Certainly the average music critic is looking for substance and they don’t find it in my music—there is no form or development. If you dismiss where my music is coming from then I don’t see how you can approach it. (Ratcliffe, 2000, p. 42)

Paul Hillier (1997) explains Pärt’s stance this way: “Sacred art (as opposed to art using or illustrating sacred themes) cannot be identified with the idea of progress” (p. 5).

Texture/Forces: “Surround sound,” “a pervading sense of glow,” “a halo of strings,” “startling contrasts”—these are all found in Richard Langham Smith’s colorful description of Tavener’s We Shall See Him As He Is. Smith (1992) continues, “[R]ather than counterpoint, each voice intones the text in sequence and then sustains, giving resonance rather than dissonance” (Smith, 1992, p. 475). Tavener’s text settings are primarily in a monophonic and homophonic texture. While Tavener claims to avoid polyphony because of the Orthodox tradition, he nevertheless uses some canonic devices and counterpoint throughout many works. He reminds us that, nevertheless, polyphony must never obscure the text (Griffiths, 1995, p. 109).

Several writers have pointed out Tavener’s love of thick textures, creating organ-like sonorities (e.g. Smith, 1992, p. 476). In contrast to Tavener’s use of large forces and of multiple voices per part, Pärt’s music is far more chamber-like and is usually written for one voice or instrument on a part. Even in his choral works, Pärt maintains the same basic texture of three to five undulating voices (Bryars, 1992, p. 729). Paul Hillier (1997, pp. 91-92) expands upon this description of Pärt’s style by explaining that from a general texture of two-voiced polyphony, one
finds examples in Pärt’s music in which several more voices are added, always in pairs (one T-voice to one M-voice). This approach applies to both vocal and instrumental parts. In contrast to the richness of sonority favored by Tavener, Pärt uses a leaner tonal palette; his music is frequently described as “austere” and “spare” (Mellers, 1989, p. 24). Susan Bradshaw points out an interesting contradiction in Pärt’s selection of forces. Instrumental accompaniment is not allowed in the Russian Orthodox tradition but Part, a devoted adherent to Orthodoxy, has chosen instead to follow the Roman tradition of using instrumental accompaniment in many of his sacred choral works.

_Timbre/Sonority:_ Both Tavener and Pärt are intensely interested in sonority. Pärt once worked as a radio engineer, and he continues to dictate very specific tonal requirements at rehearsals and recording sessions. Hillier (1997) says, “Pärt has always cherished close contact with performers of any new works, not only to guide their interpretation, but to adjust his own score if necessary, in order that the music might ‘sound’” (p. 78).

It has already been suggested that for Tavener, sonority is also a separate element to be meticulously determined (Smith, 1992, p. 475). Of Tavener it is said, “The _Two Hymns for the Mother of God_ exploit the beautiful, resonant layers of sound” (Moody, Phillips, 1987, p. 18). Burns (1992) describes Tavener’s approach this way, “With these forces Tavener creates a score of idiosyncratic timbres for each principal idea, a process which may be likened to the different mozaics or paints that make up the colours of an ikon.” (Burn, 1992).

Although both composers are exacting in their requirements for timbre, they approach the issue from rather different places. While Tavener’s choices for timbre are described as colorful, two different sources describe Pärt’s music as “black and white.” Nora Pärt says of her husband,
This is why he calls harmony, orchestration, timbre, rhythm (and much more) ‘cosmetics’ in relation to his compositional approach. While other composers habitually include all possible – and impossible – musical means into their composition from the very start and paint with ‘colours,’ Arvo draws “in black and white.” (Smith, 1999, p. 24)

When Ivan Moody uses the phrase, he is not only referring to tone color, he is attempting to characterize the non-dramatic, non-expressive text setting of Pärt’s Passio (Moody, 1996, p. 69).

The bell provides a unique and intriguing source of sonority, fascinating to both Tavener and Pärt. From Haydon we learn that Tavener grew up in England and has incorporated English handbell ringing into many of his pieces. Since his conversion to Orthodoxy, his interest has grown to include the church bell traditions of Greece and Russia (Hayden, 1997). Not only has Tavener incorporated eastern tolling patterns and the acoustical properties of bells into parts for other instruments, he has also written parts for actual church bells in some of his compositions (Crowthers, 1994, pp. 10-11). The Orthodox bell tradition is important to Pärt for both religious and cultural reasons. The Soviet State banned church bell playing in Pärt’s native Estonia and as a result, church bells became a deeply religious and nationalistic symbol. Tavener and Pärt would likely agree with Paul Hillier that bells are the “aural icons” of the Russian people (Hillier, 1997, p. 22).

A variety of other influences have crept into Tavener’s work in recent years. He has become increasingly interested in the music of the East; Sufi poetry and music, Indian and Arabic music, Russian chant and especially Greek musical traditions. In Ikon of Light, Tavener asks the singers to use microtonal embellishments in the Greek Byzantine tradition (Crowthers, 1994, pp. 12-13). Tavener describes his use of exotic instruments in one of his latest compositions, Fall and Resurrection (2000), “The resonance of beautiful ancient instruments – the kaval, the ram’s horn and the Tibetan temple bowls – brings to mind and soul something primordial, something lost, something innocent, something wild and untamed” (Tavener, 1994).

Hand in hand with this interest in sonority, John Tavener exhibits great concern for the specific spatial arrangement of the performing forces. In fact, Anderson (1999, p. 30) feels that
he is more alert to the dramatic possibilities of space than any other composer currently writing. Smith (1992) describes the effect as “surround sound” (p. 475) and Tavener maintains ‘I never use space unless there’s a symbolic, metaphysical reason for it” (Anderson, 1999, p. 30).

Expression/Style. Discussions of style often invite the use of words that are vague or saturated with a variety of meanings. These discussions prove to be no exception. Descriptive terms encountered in this review include “calm,” “detached,” “meditative,” and “simple.” The word “stasis” is used frequently to describe a timeless quality found in the music. This is not to say that this music is not expressive. Indeed, in describing the expressive effects of this music, several writers reveal a substantial difference between the music of Arvo Pärt and John Tavener.

Tavener incorporates numerous dramatic elements in his music. “To a large extent, all of Tavener’s work is dramatic, most of it in the sense that all liturgical music is essentially dramatic” (Morton, 1992, p. 916). This is also evident in the more overtly dramatic works Tavener has written; The Whale, the opera Therese, The Fall and Resurrection, and Lament for the Mother of God. Tavener’s fondness for blocks of contrasting sonorities contributes to this sense of drama, as do the use of extreme ranges, dynamics and textures (Wright, 1994, p. 393).

Whiteman (1997), in her analysis of Passio, maintains that Pärt’s approach is deliberately non-dramatic. She claims that Pärt “uses the music to subvert the drama,” and that, in subverting the drama, Pärt creates a work that is far different than most realizations of Passion settings. Pärt, in fact, brings this concert work to an area which has been considered specific to the spiritual pilgrim: contemplation and meditation. Passio is not the telling of a story in the normative, performative sense. (p. 6)

Other differences between Pärt and Tavener can be found in their scores. Paul Hillier describes the challenge of working from a Pärt score that shows only the notes and a few dynamic markings—nothing else. The Hilliard Ensemble’s experience with early music equips them with an appropriate interpretive approach and, when he is there, Pärt provides detailed and
practical directions about all aspects of the performance or recording (Hillier, 1989, p. 137). Tavener, on the other hand, fills the score with numerous expressive indications, not only for dynamics and articulation, but to evoke non-musical qualities. Both composers seem to have consciously excluded virtuosity from their music.² Paul Hillier echoes the enthusiasm of many choral musicians in discovering here a body of music that amateur choirs can successfully negotiate (Hillier, 1997, p. 2).

Compositional Approach/Working Habits

Arvo Pärt and John Tavener display very different habits in their day-to-day compositional routine. One obvious difference is that Tavener rarely revises, while Pärt writes slowly and frequently rewrites his compositions.

As Tavener describes his compositional habits, he spends a good deal of time reflecting on a text and then, with the work almost wholly formed in his head, he sits down and furiously notates the composition. Once he finishes a composition, he makes few changes: “[T]he music comes already scored...The music comes to me already embodied in instrumental sounds” (Tavener, 1999, p. 147). He continues: “Usually pieces that come to me literally fully born don’t last more than four, five minutes, something like that. If I’m asked to write a choral piece for a special occasion, if it doesn’t come to me within a day, I know the piece isn’t going to come at all” (Anderson, 1999, p. 28). This is in contrast to the process encountered in composing large works. Tavener claims that, in Fall and Resurrection, it took him six weeks to write one page of dense, highly complex (serial) music to represent chaos (Anderson, 1999, p. 28). Tavener rarely revises or re-writes his works and does not return to old ideas: “[E]verything I do has to be new...If one sees music as a spiritual journey, as I do, then it must always go forward, and I think it must eventually end in silence” (Griffiths, 1985, p. 111).

Typically a slow writer (Bradshaw, 1995, p. 442) with a modest output, Pärt has a

² A possible exception might be the extreme ranges with which Tavener challenges his sopranos and basses, as well as the very challenging parts he writes specifically for soprano, Patricia Rozario. (Hayden, 1995)
pennant for rewriting his compositions. Almost all of his publications have two dates on them and sometimes there are more than ten years between editions (Gant, 2000, p. 30). Gant describes the three versions of the Berliner Messe as examples of Pärt’s revision process. Composed originally for liturgical use, it was scored for organ and voices. Pärt then expanded the score for chorus and strings, and then returned to an organ accompaniment for the final version, this time incorporating the string figurations in the organ score. Other minor changes in register, color and mode were made, and then reversed (Gant, 2000, p. 30). Paul Hillier reveals that it was at his suggestion that the original version was revived, and he points out interesting comparisons between the Berliner Messe and the Missa Sillabica of twelve years earlier. Hillier finds it less austere and points out that although the piece is based on the “tintinnabuli” technique, there is a four-note motive which recurs in two movements of the Berliner Messe. (Hillier, 1998 p. 6). Pärt himself describes briefly the two-year process that resulted in the Kanon Pokajanen (Canon of Repentence) (Bobrick-Grönke & Pärt, 1997, p. 9). Comments such as these are rare and Pärt’s famous reticence in discussing his work or his compositional habits is well-documented by Kostelanetz, who quotes Pärt as saying,

‘Franz Schubert,’ he told me, ‘explained nothing; it not necessary. He wrote songs. They are the best explaining. Now people write about it. That’s absurd. It’s never the music. It’s explaining.’ Generalizing about the current scene, he railed, ‘There is no music; there is only explanations.’ He illustrated by extending his hands, palms up, then turning them over. The world, he seemed to suggest, is upside down. (Kostelanetz, 1990, p. 72)

In a more recent interview with Geoff Smith (1999), Pärt describes the changes in his approach and ideas over the last several years, citing his use of dynamics as one example. He strives today to make his music more ‘palatable’ in contrast to earlier works that were based on a more theoretical concept. “This has nothing to do with accommodating every taste within an audience. There has to be, however, a balance between the human perceptive faculty and the musical presentation” (Smith, 1999, p. 21).
Susan Bradshaw (1983, p. 26) compares the severity of *Passio* to a more relaxed approach in later works, using as examples, the reappearance of ostinato rhythms in *Stabat Mater* and *Te Deum*, of the use of contrasting keys in *Berliner Messe*, and of the use of a large symphony orchestra in *Litany*. The organist, Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, describes Pärt’s habit of constant improvement, “He takes a long time to find ‘the particular turn of the kaleidoscope.’ It’s his expression of the creative process” (Asch, 2001, p. 29).

Ivan Moody (2000, p. 129) provides the only overview of Tavener’s style and output amid the numerous articles reviewed for this document. Moody points to 1981 as a pivotal year in which Tavener was able to reconcile a serially derived musical vocabulary with liturgical elements, finding dramatic consistency and a new lyricism along the way. In studying the numerous and popular choral works from this time forward, Moody points to a shift to chant-derived modal principles from a serial approach. While Tavener has always treated his instrumental writing with subtlety and originality, he has expanded his scope with several very successful instrumental compositions during the last decade.

While Pärt attributes very little of his work to the influence of other composers or traditions (Kostelanetz, 1990, p.72), Tavener often cites specific works and composers as sources of inspiration. In almost every interview Tavener describes the impact of Stravinsky’s *Canticum Sacrum* upon his life, first heard at the age of twelve (Ford, 1993, p. 89). He describes both Stravinsky and Webern as mystics, and Bamberger names Stravinsky as Tavener’s “secular *spiritus rector*” (Bamberger, 1999, p.12). While Tavener admires Handel’s musical facility immensely, and listens to a Bach cantata every day (Tavener, 1999, p.142), he decries the absence of “sacred art” in virtually all of western music. “Beethoven’s music may be the most extraordinary human cry ever uttered, but it isn’t sacred art” (Ford, 1993, p.90). Other non-
western influences on the music of Tavener have been mentioned elsewhere in this review.

The biographies of Tavener and Pärt return again and again to a common theme. Central
to the craft of both composers is a fervent and personal commitment to finding a spiritual ‘center’
from which to draw inspiration. Time spent in meditation and reflection is not a luxury; it gives
rise to the music itself (Hillier, 1997 and Hayden, 1995).

Minimalism/New Simplicity/Postmodernism

From a life steeped in spiritual reflection, Pärt and Tavener have arrived at a common
goal in their approach to composition and to life. That goal is simplicity (McCarthy, 1989;
Crowthers, 1994). In taking this stance of simplicity, Pärt and Tavener have rejected the
humanistic tradition of musical composition championed first by Beethoven and then by
succeeding generations of composers. The principles of musical development and the increasing
melodic and rhythmic complexity of much of 20th century music are eschewed (Moody &
Phillips, 1987, p. 12). Pärt and Tavener are frequently painted as ‘anti-modernists’: “Pärt’s
passage to tonality, simplicity and homogeneity moves in the opposite direction from the
historical progression of musical materials that underpins modernism, the dominant aesthetic of
the 20th century” (Clarke, 1993, p. 682). For Tavener, modernism is a “mechanical collection
of ever-more complex, ever-more inane formulae that are essentially dead. It cannot truly
communicate. It is the antithesis of communication” (Tavener, 1999, p. 96).

In his thought-provoking argument for modernism, Josiah Fisk describes the
philosophical approach and musical style of Pärt, Tavener and Henryck Gorecki as “the new
simplicity” (Fisk, 1994, p. 403). Fisk argues that all links with the classical tradition have been
severed, leaving instead music that “offers no dialogue, no ambiguity, and no inner life” (Fisk,
1994, p. 411).³ David Clarke echoes similar misgivings, describing the “perilously fine line Pärt treads between simplicity and vacuity” (Clarke, 1993, p. 683). In responding to Clarke’s article, Paul Murphy poses the following question, “But does Pärt provide his listeners with a meaning and a language relevant to contemporary life, or does he simply offer a way into a nostalgic religious introversion? (Murphy, 1994, p. 137). Geoff Smith responds that, “far from escape, it seems an heroic attempt to re-establish lines with our collective unconscious…there is a sense of adjusting one’s eyes to a light one was least expecting. There is certainly no trace of the quietism or spiritual limpness so often assumed” (Smith, 1999, p. 19).

A very different approach to this issue is broached by Paul Griffiths, who maintains that this simplicity may well be complex on another level,

The intention of complex music seems clear: to absorb the listener’s attention wholly for the duration. But simple music, which leaves space within that attention, thereby complicates communication: what are we meant to be doing while an A minor chord is being slowly arpeggiated? …Pärt’s music, however simple in substance, is complex in that it stands before us inexplicably tongue-tied. We may feel that we have nothing to say in return. (1995, p. 313)

Griffiths goes on to say that there are two kinds of complexity, one residing in the substance of the music, and one beyond and around it, a kind of complexity of existence.

In comparing the music of Pärt and Birtwistle (who represents modernistic complexity) he has this to say,

As for the argument from life, part of the complexity of our existences is that they contain periods of calm as well as rush, and perhaps this is the complexity we most need to understand and value: the complexity of Pärt together with Birtwistle. (Griffiths, 1995, p. 313)

Richard Hillert claims that Pärt uses this new simplicity as a vehicle for reaching deeply into the spiritual reserves of the unconscious and evoking a feeling of peace and contemplation.

³ Fisk has provided a list of recordings reviewed in his article. They contain none of Tavener’s choral works from the last 25 years and Pärt’s last twenty years are represented only by Passio.
(Hillert, 1996, p. 19) while Susan Bradshaw makes this observation,

He seems, in other words, to be trying to avoid any hint of complication for complication’s sake; eschewing musical verbosity above all, he believes that anything that has no properly audible (as opposed to merely textural or cerebral) purpose has no place in his work. (1983, p. 25)

Tavener’s immersion in the culture of Greek Orthodoxy may help to explain his commitment to simplicity. Bradley Bamberger claims that in “exalting the ideals of simplicity and humility in his words and music, Tavener’s credo is more East than West” (1999, p. 12).

It may be apparent from this discussion that ‘simplicity’ means many things to many people, and that such a broad term is hard-pressed to adequately describe a compositional approach or a philosophy. In the same 1999 interview, Arvo Pärt takes his old stance, “All important things in life are simple,” while at the same time, contradicting some of the generalizations found in this review:

I cannot help it but start from scratch. I am tempted only when I experience something unknown, something new and meaningful for me. It seems, however, that this unknown territory is sooner reached by way of reduction than by growing complexity. Reduction certainly doesn’t mean simplification, but it is the way—at least in an ideal scenario—to the most intense concentration on the essence of things. (Smith, 1999, p. 19)

Another label earned by Tavener, Pärt and Gorecki is that of “holy” or “mystical minimalist” (Rockwell, 1993, p. 24). Most writers agree that Pärt and Tavener’s use of reduced materials in a repetitive fashion could earn them the label “minimalist” (Kostelanetz, 1990, p. 68). Robert Schwarz (1996), in his lucid discussion of minimalism, offers his definition of the American movement emerging in the 1960’s,

Minimalist music is based on the notion of reduction, the paring down to a minimum of the materials that a composer will use in a given work...harmony, rhythm, dynamics, instrumentation—remains fixed for the duration of the work, or changes only very slowly. And the chief structural technique is unceasing repetition, exhilarating to some, mind-numbing to others. (Schwarz, 1996, p. 9)
He continues to describe the time-suspending qualities resulting from non-western and popular influences on minimalist composers and points out that each of the American minimalists have, over time, become profoundly religious (1996, p.9, p. 16). Schwarz devotes considerable time to the life and work of Pärt. While laying out the minimalist elements of Pärt’s tintinnabuli technique, he contrasts these elements with Pärt’s ‘neo-medievalism’ and his ‘burning spirituality’ (1996, pp.209, p. 215). Susan Bradshaw echoes some of these sentiments,

He fits no obvious pigeon-hole, and while his work has featured recently in a festival of ‘minimalist’ music, he would seem to be attempting to derive the maximum expressive truth from means that are minimal by virtue of inner necessity rather than calculated design” (Bradshaw, 1983, p. 28).

Mellers (1989) claims of Pärt: “He has sometimes been allied, since he uses few notes and much repetition, with the fashionable minimalists, though his reiterated phrases, being intrinsically expressive, are in effect not minimal at all” (p. 24).

Tavener responds to the label of ‘holy minimalist,’ “It’s a facetious journalistic caption…[M]inimalism means absolutely nothing at all to me. In fact, I’d almost prefer the ‘new complexity,’ because I find minimalism is just purely computer music for idiots” (1999, p. 102).

While it is evident that Tavener is eager to enter the verbal fray, Arvo Pärt deems these discussions irrelevant (Rockwell, 1994 p. 24). Pärt himself says, “The future of music history is not one of my main concerns. I have enough to do with getting myself out of this hole in which we all find ourselves. Who will save whom in the end is unknown to us” (Smith, 1999, p. 24).

While the term “post-modernism” may mean different things to different music scholars, two writers have chosen this word in relation to the work of Tavener and Pärt. One of these writers, Jan Passler, lists a number of characteristics associated with this movement: a re-
evaluation of music’s expressive potential, a rejection of the need for constant change and originality, and a rejection of the need for an increasingly difficult and intellectual approach to music. These modernist ideals are replaced by a return to more traditionally accessible notions of music. These trends have emerged since the 1960s and, in Britain and the United States; it has also been associated with the neo-conservatism of the 1980’s (Pasler, 2001, p. 213). Pasler includes Arvo Pärt in his list of post-modernist composers, “In Arvo Pärt’s music, it mirrors a return to spirituality and mysticism in the contemporary world” (Pasler, 2001, p. 214).

Ivan Moody describes what he believes to be a branch of post-modernism practiced by Gorecki, Pärt and Tavener,

All three have in common with the minimalist composers an economy of means and a directness of effect; what distinguishes them is purpose – they are motivated by deep religious conviction, manifesting itself as a conscious asceticism and spareness. It is an extra-musical dimension determining the function of the artistic product as a means to an end, in exactly the same way as ecclesiastical statuary or an ikon. (Moody, 1987, p. 28)

While Josiah Fisk (1994) does not use the term ‘post-modernist’ he contributes an impassioned view of the Modernist tradition and then claims that for everything modernism is, the “new simplicity” is not (p. 403).

Conclusion

Despite the limited number of systematic descriptions, it is revealing to note that there is a high level of agreement among the writers in their general descriptions of both the philosophical and musical aspects of the compositions at hand. A word of caution must be raised. The articles and compositions must be considered in their chronological context. It is inevitable that any serious composer will evidence changes and evolution in his every growing body of work and comments made by writers in the 1980’s must be considered in a different light from discussions presented within the past five years. At the same time, the essential characteristics of both Pärt and Tavener’s music appear to have remained fairly constant over the
last twenty years, for while there is variety in the detail, the overall affect is distinctive and consistent. Even as techniques evolve, the motivation and inspiration appears to spring from the same *ethos* of religious conviction.
CHAPTER 3
DISCUSSION OF WORKS

Arvo Pärt’s *Te Deum*

Introduction

The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. (Gospel of John, 3:8, the only text to accompany the ECM recording of Pärt’s *Te Deum*)

Arvo Pärt’s *Te Deum* has been selected as a work worthy of analysis and representative of the composer’s oeuvre. With its dynamic and metrical contrasts and greater shifts in color, texture, and sonority, *Te Deum* is far less austere than earlier tintinnabuli works such as *Passio* and is thus more approachable to the performer and the listener alike. The text is one of the great hymns of the Christian church, and is familiar to any adherent of the sacred choral tradition. This author finds in *Te Deum* a work of great impact, both for its wealth of sonorities and for its illumination of this text that is both profound and universal to Christendom.

Although its exact origins are disputed, the *Te Deum* is first mentioned as a hymn text in the *Rule of St Caesarius*, A.D. 502. From that time to the present, the *Te Deum* has been sung at the end of Matins on most Sundays or Feast days. It has also been employed as a thanksgiving hymn on all number of religious (and political) occasions and has been given musical settings by scores of composers. The hymn is tripartite in structure. The first section of ten verses comprises a hymn of praise to God the Father. Section two, containing 23 verses, is a hymn of praise to Christ: the Redeemer, the eternal Son, and the coming Judge. The hymn to Christ concludes with a series of petitions by the faithful. These petitions are taken from the Psalms (Jeffers,
1988, p. 217-220). Pärt changes nothing in the Latin text, except to combine groups of verses by idea or subject matter, dividing the 29 verses into 17 movements. The last movement is a kind of coda in which Pärt presents several repetitions of the three-measure choral “Sanctus” from the third movement (Rehearsal #[13]).

Arvo Pärt describes the hymn as consisting of ‘immutable truths,’ which remind him of the ‘immeasurable serenity imparted by a mountain panorama.’ In this setting he seeks to convey a mood “that could be infinite in time, by delicately removing one piece – one particle of time – out of the flow of infinity. I had to draw this music gently out of silence and emptiness.” (Hillier, 1997, p. 140)

Pärt scores Te Deum for three choirs (SA, TB, SATB), a string orchestra, a prepared piano and a wind harp which essentially provides a very low drone.¹ There are three different textures that alternate throughout the work. In each movement the opening chant is sung by the small treble or T/B ensemble. The text is then repeated with an SATB response, or an orchestral passage. On occasion Pärt combines the SATB chorus and strings for moments of greater impact.

The performance and reception history of Te Deum is not documented in available literature (to date). It is interesting to note that as recently as 1995 Passio was performed to sell-out crowds in London, more than ten years after its premiere. (Bradshaw, 1995, p. 442)² The first commercial recording of Te Deum was released in 1993 by ECM studios (with the

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¹ The wind harp is also known as the Aeolian harp, an instrument consisting of a sound box and strings which is placed outside. The wind creates vibrations in the strings, resulting in audible overtones. The wind harp can be small or very large (Harvard Dictionary, 1977) Pärt provides no discussion of the instrument. A recording is available from the publisher for performances.

² Anecdotal evidence confirms the continued popularity of Pärt’s music with audience. The author participated in a performance of Te Deum in Philadelphia in 2002 that was both well attended and well received (Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, conductor, Donald Nally).
collaboration of Arvo Pärt) and Deutsche Grammophon released another recording of the work in 2000.


This analysis will first examine Pärt’s tintinnabuli approach to melodic composition, an approach that renders both linear and vertical implications. A study of the relationship between text and rhythm and formal structures will follow. Timbre and texture will then be examined as important considerations in *Te Deum*.

*Melody:* Part’s approach to composition has been described as formulaic; his ethos, one of simplicity. These descriptions refer to the composer’s highly structured tintinnabuli technique, in which a reduced vocabulary of musical materials is manipulated to form always changing melodic patterns.

It is in the SATB choral passages of each movement that we find the most lucid and consistent examples of Pärt’s technique. The term “tintinnabuli” essentially refers to a two-voiced texture in which one voice is designated as the melody or M-voice, while the other, performing only members of a triad, is called the tintinnabuli, or T-voice.

The M-voice is derived from four ‘modes’ (unrelated to the church modes) or ‘cells.’3 These modes move in stepwise motion, either away from or towards a tonal ‘center’ (in *Te Deum* that pitch is A) (See Fig.3-1). The number of syllables in the word or phrase determines the number of pitches in each cell; the cells are therefore constantly expanding or contracting. For example, a three-syllable word would usually be set to three pitches based on one of the modes, a

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3 These modes are identified by Paul Hillier in his examination of tintinnabuli in *Arvo Pärt*, 1997, p. 140-145) and they appear in Fig. 3-1.
four-syllable word to four, etc. A one-syllable word is always assigned to the tonal center which, for the bass and alto voices in Te Deum, is A. Fig.3-2 shows the technique as it is applied to the alto voice in Movement I, # [2]. An exception often occurs at the end of a word or phrase when Pärt repeats the final pitch, allowing for a degree of melodic and metrical flexibility (See Fig.3-2).

In Te Deum, the soprano and tenor T-voices are without exception limited to the three pitches of the D major or D minor triad. They oscillate through the different members of the triad, resting on the root or third of the triad at the end of almost every phrase, and at the end of every section. There is no mirror relationship between the two T-voices as there are between the two M-voices. As with the M-voice, Pärt often repeats the final pitch of a word or phrase.

A tight correlation exists between the M and T-voices, and in examining this relationship; Paul Hillier (1997, p.93) describes two positions:

First Position: The T-voice provides that pitch in the triad that is nearest to the M-voice. Second Position: The T-voice pitch is the next but one in the triad.

The T-voice can be applied above the M-voice (‘superior’ position), below the M-voice (‘inferior’) position or alternating above and below the M-voice. (p. 94). These principles present themselves in the analysis at hand, yet Pärt eschews rigid adherence in favor of an increased flexibility of melody and counterpoint.

In Movement I, the soprano T-voice is in first position, superior placement to the alto M-voice. The tenor T-voice follows a similar relationship to the bass M-voice, but there are exceptions that appear to be determined by phrase shape and stress (See Fig.3-2). Pärt typically employs contrary motion between the sets of voices, this can be seen between the M-voices in Fig.3-2 and between the T-voices in Fig.3-3.
Pärt departs from this tight T/M-voice interaction in the instrumental passages. Here the T-voice plays a subordinate role, making short musical comments against the longer phrases of the M-voice, which, instead of being strictly step-wise, includes triadic elements as well (See Fig. 3-6).

*Chant:* Each of the 17 movements begins with a chanted rendition of the hymn verse. Despite using chant-like characteristics, Pärt does not draw from pre-existing sources for his melodies. The chants contain recognizable links to the four tintinnabuli modes, and to the choral or instrumental material that follows (See Fig. 3-4). The structure of the opening chant is freer than following sections and the use of embellishments and melismas tend to obscure the initial melodic shape (See Fig. 3-5).

Pärt often uses melismatic embellishments to set apart a word or syllable. In Fig.3-5, the chant portion is highly embellished to provide weight to the text, “Sanctus, Domine Deus Sabaoth, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.” Rather than embellishing with step-wise motion alone, Pärt inserts triadic figures between the principal notes of the mode. The result is a hybrid of the M-voice and the T-voice, creating a lively line full of motion. The choral passage that follows, repeating the same text, echoes the triadic patterns heard in the preceding chant (Shown in Fig. 3-3). Other portions of chant in *Te Deum* also reflect this flexibility between step-wise and triadic motion.

Occasionally Pärt expands the texture to a two-voice chant, in which the two parts reflect either an M-T voice relationship or proceed in parallel motion. The aural effect is very like that of early organum (See Fig. 3-6).

*Treatment of Instrumental Passages:* The melodic writing for the strings is distinguished from the choral passages by greater motion and contrast and the by the use of melodic repetition.
The string parts are also divided into pairs of M and T voices. An example can be found at the beginning of Movement III, in which the contrabass M-voice, derived from the chant line, emerges as an 8-bar phrase (See Fig. 3-7).\(^4\) The divided celli provide a T-voice accompaniment until the lower cello part picks up the M-voice and doubles the bass line. In the second eight-bar phrase (#[7]), the melody is played an octave higher in the contra bass part while the viola plays a mirror-image of the melody in contrary motion. In the next eight-bar phrase (#[8]) the material from the preceding phrase is repeated an octave higher again. Pärt is fond of layering textures and passing the melodic material from the low to the upper strings. He reverses this procedure in some movements, beginning the instrumental section with the embellished chant melody in the first violins, and adding successively lower voices that either mirror the melody or provide a T-voice counterpoint. The M-voice melody is often repeated once or twice, usually in different voices, but there is no overlapping imitation of material within a phrase.

The instrumental T-voice is formed into two- or three-note units, punctuated by frequent rests. This disjunctive commentary provides a contrast to the more linear quality of the M-voice. The instrumental M and T-voices play more distinctive roles than they do in the choral sections, where the character and articulation of the M and T-voices are essentially the same. The greatest melodic variety and density can be found in the tutti passages in which all of the ensembles join together. The strings no longer present their own M- and T voices, but instead take on an accompanying role. In Movement IV, Pärt doubles the two-part tenor/bass chant with the viola and cello. As the chorus enters in six parts, the strings are given different tasks: the basses and celli play fragments of the bass voice line, the second violins play a version of the alto M-voice,

\(^4\) The term “phrase” will be used in this document in the simplest sense, drawing upon the Harvard Dictionary’s definition of phrase as “a division of the musical line.” Traditional formal and cadential structures are not implied in describing the “phrases” found in the music of Pärt and Tavener.
and the upper strings play rapidly repeating single pitches or double stops, all based on the D major triad. The dynamic marking is ff, the texture is thick and the range is wide (See Fig. 3-8).

Pärt employs the full range of the strings in the orchestral passages, and exposes the ear to frequent register contrasts by passing melodic material from one instrument to another.

_Drone:_ A unique element in _Te Deum_ that affects the aural perception of range and tonality lies in the unrelenting presence of the _ison_, or drone. The _ison_ is performed primarily on the wind harp. In the recording, the wind harp drone sounds like a very low, electronically generated pitch. This drone is also supported at times throughout the work by the string some octaves higher. The wind harp plays a fundamental pitch (A or D) that is so low that it might be difficult to discern the pitch without the corresponding octaves (and fifths) appearing in the strings. The _ison_ is tacet for movement VI and for many of the instrumental passages, but it is present in all _tutti_ sections and appears continuously from movement XIII through the end of the work.

_Range:_ The tintinnabuli structure inherently limits melodic range. While the M-voices operate within the most restricted range, the T-voice range often extends beyond an octave when presenting the triad in its various inversions. The M-voice range limitations do not extend to the chant passages. Movement III opens with a chant line that spans almost two octaves while Movement XIII at #[67] is the most striking example of Pärt’s employment of wide range. The text, “And we praise Your Name into eternity and ages upon ages” is sung by the both men and women, beginning at the bottom of the staff and rising continually throughout the phrase, coming to rest two octaves above the original pitch (See Fig. 3-9).

_Te Deum_ is through-composed, and because of the non-repeating nature of the text, there are almost no repeated phrases in _Te Deum_’s vocal lines. While there are no phrases of the same
length in the choral passages, the instrumental responses to the chant do include the repetition of phrases within a regular metrical structure and, on occasion, phrases of the same length that are repeated. An example can be found in Movement III in which an 8-bar phrase, corresponding to the length of the preceding chant, is stated by the contrabass, and then repeated twice, with corresponding T-voices, contributing towards a 32-bar section. Other movements reveal passages composed of two or three phrases of irregular length and lasting 4, 5, 6, 7 or 10 measures. These passages are then re-stated one to four times (Examples can be found in Movement V at #21 and Movement VI at #26).

**Tonality/Modality:** The tonal center of *Te Deum* is D. This pitch is reiterated unrelentingly by the drone and by the T-voices with brief excursions to other tonal centers. There are constant shifts between the major and natural minor forms of D, indicated by changing key signatures at the beginning of the clearly articulated sections. (In Movement IV, the chant portion is set in D minor while the choral response is in D major).

There are no modulations in the seventeen movements of *Te Deum*, and there are few digressions to other tonalities. While D is a predominant sonority and tonal center, the composer does allow other pitches to emerge in importance for brief periods of time.

The *ison* moves from D to A several times in the work, and at one point a drone of A and E emerges in the strings. Although the drones change pitch, the material above the drones does not in any way reflect a change in tonality. Pärt’s use of two simultaneous ‘resting’ pitches (the T-voice comes to rest on D, the M-voice on A) may reflect the liturgical practice in which the psalms are recited on a psalm tone or ‘tenor,’ which is the fifth degree above the ‘final’ or first pitch in any given church mode. Might we have in *Te Deum*, then, both the ‘tenor’ and the ‘final’ heard simultaneously throughout the work?
Pärt allows for a degree of tonal ambiguity in the chant melodies. While centered on D for much of Te Deum, some of the chant phrases reflect the tonal centers of A and G (in Mvts. V and XV), and F (in Mvt. XIV). Other examples of tonal ambiguity can be found in Mvt. IV, XII, XV, and XVI.5

In Movement IX, Pärt combines the two modes as the violins accompany the voices with rapidly descending and ascending stepwise figures: alternating between D major and D minor. The viola plays T-voice like figures, also shifting between the major and minor forms of the D triad. The vocal parts join in the modal ambiguity (See Fig.3-10).

The presence of a drone and the limited scope of pitches available in the tintinnabuli framework contribute to a remarkably stable tonal world.

Harmony/Vertical Implications: According to Jan LaRue, “…the history of western European Music (and its derivatives) stands out immediately because of a central emphasis on Harmony” (1970, p. 39). If this is the case, then it must be concluded that the work of Arvo Pärt departs conspicuously from western music traditions. There are no harmonic progressions in tintinnabuli, there is no distinction between harmony and melody, or, as Paul Hillier puts it, tintinnabuli represents “two sides of the same coin—a tonality that can be expressed both horizontally and vertically” (Hillier, 1997, p. 91). There are several places in Te Deum where it is possible to identify triads as primary chords. In Fig. 3-2, a G-minor triad can be found on the first beat of m. 2. While this could be labeled a iv chord in the key of D minor, the function of the pitches/voices appear to be linear and the contrapuntal texture discourages any aural perception of a chord ‘progression.’ A fundamental element of harmony does permeate the

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5 This expanded tonal picture represents a relaxing of the stringent tintinnabuli process found in earlier works such as Passio, where the tonality is confined to one pitch and triad for the entire work.
tintinnabuli system in the form of the ubiquitous major/minor triad. In *Te Deum*, each T-voice revolves around the D-major or D-minor triad.

Pärt's compositional technique in *Te Deum* results in a distinctive vertical sonority. The alto and bass M-voices center on A, traveling by step away from and back again to A. These stepwise units are surrounded by the D triad in the soprano and tenor voices (as shown in Fig.3-2). The interval of the second occurs constantly, as the triad interacts with the scalar patterns. The resulting effect of these dissonances is akin to those heard in the passing tones and suspensions of more conventional western music. While the pulse-to-pulse 'dissonances' create momentary instability or tension, the overall vertical characteristic is one of stability as the ends of each phrase or section return to either the open fifth or triad.

If one function of traditional harmony is to promote tonal stability, then Pärt remains in the musical mainstream, for *Te Deum* exists in a simple and relentlessly stable tonal world. There are no modulations and no truly chromatic chords. *Te Deum* is firmly in D, with both the major and natural minor modes of that key given equal treatment.

While the key signatures never stray from the key of D, the alto and bass M-voices, the *ison*, and the occasional string drones spend considerable time on the pitch A. Without the presence of a dominant triad (especially the leading tone), it is difficult to apply any strong harmonic implications to the presence of A, but at the least it represents a strong dominant 'overtone' in the harmonic series of D.

Another factor that contributes to this stable, almost static tonal environment is the absence of harmonic rhythm, and subsequently, the absence of forward motion found in the tension and release of traditional chord progressions.
The previously mentioned ‘vertical sonority’ unique to tintinnabuli might better be described as a form of counterpoint, for Pärt has created two equally important, inter-dependent melodic lines that speak simultaneously. The M and T- voices begin and end each phrase together and while this fact might eliminate any comparison with traditional imitative counterpoint, the texture could be described as non-imitative counterpoint.

An analytical dichotomy surfaces here. Is Pärt creating an essentially linear or an essentially vertical sensibility? While the vertical sonorities of tintinnabuli have already been mentioned, Pärt’s compositional criteria are essentially melodic and linear. Were these not the same tensions found in the composition of medieval polyphony in which the melodic choices made by the musicians determined the vertical outcome? Perhaps Pärt finds a similar tension in his own compositional process. Perhaps the term “linear tonality,” coined by La Rue (1970, p. 52), could be applied to the horizontal/vertical relationships found in tintinnabuli.

**Conclusion:** Tintinnabuli produces constant melodic undulation within a highly structured framework. The phrases unfold one after the other with little motion toward or away from climactic points but with subtle stresses occurring on important syllables and words. This underlying ebb and flow changes little from movement to movement; a constancy contributed to by rare melodic/dynamic peaks and the limited use of literal melodic repetition. Perhaps it is this limited tonal and rhythmic language that provides a sense of continuity and unity over an extended work like *Te Deum*. Although the tutti passages and the contrapuntal writing for the strings represent moments of greater melodic motion, the shape is always different and yet appears to be always the same. While acknowledging this ‘sameness’ to the music, it must be noted that Pärt actually achieves an infinite variety of melody and texture, if one is only patient enough to observe the details. The organic way in which the melody evolves might be called
“motivic transformation.” As did the early polyphonists, Pärt avoids slavishly adhering to a rigid formula in order to bring the entire sonic/tonal picture into balance and order.

In summary, an examination of the vertical implications in tintinnabuli reveals frequent changes of mode, constant dissonances and a general absence of harmonic progression and harmonic rhythm. In the absence of harmonic rhythm, moments of thicker vertical textures are employed to create the peaks and climaxes found in *Te Deum*.

*Text and Rhythm:* Arvo Pärt takes a highly formalized path to rhythm in *Te Deum*. Fundamental rhythmic units grow out of the syllabic stress of the text, resulting in a reduced rhythmic vocabulary, devoid of complexity. Tempo appears relatively stable throughout the work, and only twice does Pärt indicate substantial tempo change. While a pulse is always present, the metrical qualities vary within every movement, alternating between passages free of meter to those in a more regular triple time. In essence, simple rhythms weave in and out of regular meter.

Arvo Pärt has chosen to set one of the oldest and most famous of Latin hymns, a language and text far more universal and accessible to Christendom than might be the hymns from his own Russian Orthodox tradition. Pärt, fully versed in Gregorian chant and liturgical traditions, carefully sets each word in order to preserve its natural syllabic stress. The composer has chosen certain passages and verses in which to create moments of substantial impact. The first dynamic and textural peak occurs in Movement IV, the next in Movement IX and the final climax occurs in Movement XV (See appendix A for translation). Pärt returns to his setting of “Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,” (“Holy, holy, holy”) from Movement III and expands it to create a dramatic ending to *Te Deum*. 
The Formula: In *Te Deum*, each of the seventeen movements opens with a chant-like section in a free, embellished style with no bar lines or meter signatures. The text is given a neumatic treatment in which each of the non-stressed syllables is assigned to one pitch, while the stressed syllable of each word receives two or more notes. A melismatic treatment is used on words or syllables of extreme importance (See Fig. 3-9).

Following the opening chant, the verse is then repeated in a less embellished but more metrical setting for mixed voices in what Paul Hillier calls ‘rhythmicized patterns’ (Hillier, 1997, p. 141). It is here in the four-voiced passages that we see clear examples of Pärt’s tintinnabuli technique, in which he derives patterns of duration that correspond with the syllabic properties of the text.

Pärt assigns a duration/note-value to each syllable of each word. The non-stressed syllables receive a quarter note (or pulse) while the stressed syllables are given a longer duration, usually twice the value of the preceding syllables. This formula can be seen in Fig. 3-11.

In the choral passages, the note value for the last syllable of the last word in a phrase is extended for two to three times its value in order to maintain either 6/4-3/4 meter, or, in an unmetered passage, to balance out the phrase. A close correlation can be found between the rhythmic qualities in the opening chant and its corresponding choral/instrumental response (See Fig. 3-10).

The rhythmic vocabulary of the voice parts is limited to quarter notes and half notes, with longer durations appearing at the ends of phrases or movements. When the orchestra provides the response to the chant introduction, the melodic and rhythmic vocabulary is often an instrumental reflection of the SATB passages. At times Pärt departs from the strict tintinnabuli structure and reverts to more idiomatic string writing, expanding the rhythmic vocabulary to
include eighth notes, triplets, sixteenth note patterns, and tremelo. The shortest durations in *Te Deum* occur in *tutti* passages, when the strings accompany the mixed chorus (Fig. 3-8, 3-10).

Repeated rhythm patterns do not emerge as salient features and there is nothing that could be described as a recurring rhythmic motif. The length of both phrases and rhythmic units is irregular; two patterns of the same length almost never occur in succession. Although this might be expected in the text-based vocal parts, many of the string parts evolve in much the same way with phrases often separated by rests (giving the instrumentalists a chance to ‘breathe’ as well). The more idiomatic accompanying figures feature sets of triplets, duplets, quadruplets and sextuplets. It is only in these figures that Pärt uses literal repetition (Fig. 3-10).

In observing the metrical relations within a movement, it is interesting to note that there are essentially three levels of metrical activity. Pärt manipulates the meter in each movement by leading the listener from chant-like episodes of metrical freedom to greater metrical regularity in the SATB or orchestral responses. The most consistently metrical passages are found in the orchestral passages to which Pärt assigns a consistent triple meter (3/4 or 6/4). Each movement, then, travels from a suspension of meter to a more ordered metrical existence.

At the beginning of the sixth movement, Pärt departs from the free-metered chant style and places half notes and quarter rests throughout the chant line, possibly to emphasize the important syllables with agogic accents and/or to create a more metrical effect (Text: “Throughout the whole world the holy Church gives praise to Thee”). The string parts which follow echo the rhythms set forth in the chant, only this time they are placed within a metrical framework of ¾ or 6/4 (See Fig. 3-4).

The *Te Deum* score provides very specific tempo markings for every verse and section. Both metronome numbers and Italian tempo descriptions are used and the tempo changes usually
occur by small increments from verse to verse or between chant and response sections. Even the chant portions are assigned to a specific tempo, underlying the necessity of a constant pulse throughout the work. The tempos vary constantly, but often by only a notch or two on the metronome. It is difficult to discern the subtle differences in tempo from section to section, but constant and minimal change appears to be integral to Pärt’s overall perception of motion and movement. There are no indications for *ritardando* or *accelerando* within sections; all tempo changes take place between units or ‘paragraphs.’ It is important to note that the metronome markings in the score are provided not by the composer, but by Tõnu Kaljuste, conductor for the ECM recording (*Te Deum*, *Silouans Song*, *Magnificat*, *Berliner Messe*, ECM 1505, 1993)\(^6\).

Most of the tempi in *Te Deum* fall between *moderato* and *allegro*, as shown in Fig. 3-12. The first metronome marking in *Te Deum* is given at 92 beats per minute. This progresses incrementally to 126, at which point Pärt hovers around 108-120 until Movement VII when the chant begins at 160. The next dramatic change in tempo occurs at the climax of the work, the end of Movement XV, where the tutti section is marked “Largo,” 56 beats per minute, (a 2 to 1 relationship with the preceding tempo). The tempos from there to the end of the work return to the realm of *moderato-allegro*.

A unique aspect of Pärt’s compositional approach to rhythm lies in his treatment of rests. He uses them pervasively to divide phrases and to create physical breaths in the rhythmic fabric of both the instrumental and vocal parts.\(^7\) These rests divide phrases in the chant passages, SATB, and instrumental sections and they render an expressive impact. Paul Hillier describes a passage in Movement XVI at #[77], “In te Domine…In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust”, as “the

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\(^6\) The composer collaborated closely with the conductor in this recording of *Te Deum*.

\(^7\) There may be acoustical as well as philosophical reasons for the use of rests. Slower tempi and more frequent pauses between phrases of text become necessary for clarity in the active acoustics of large sanctuaries and performance halls.
maximum point of exhaustion and spiritual abasement” (1997, p. 144). Pärt achieves this by setting a rest after each word; the duration of each rest is often the same as the length of the last syllable of the word (See Fig. 3-13).

Pärt again reveals his preoccupation with silence and its relation to sound at the end of Te Deum, when the Sanctus is stated three times, each statement followed by bars of rest. The statement/rest combination is repeated six times, with the bars of rests increasing from three to five throughout the passage. It is as though rhythm itself is somehow being returned, from small temporal units, back to time itself, rippling out into eternity.

Periods of greater rhythmic activity are usually found in the instrumental parts and they seem to flow in and out of a general attitude of lull or calm. These episodes of increased activity are the result of Pärt’s penchant for layering the instrumental voices. Often a single instrument will initiate the embellished chant, another instrument will join in, often in an accompanying role. The rhythmic activity seems to increase with the addition of voices, although the tempo and note values do not change substantially. The music appears to flow along a continuum; most of the transitions between sections and movements are designed with overlapping sonorities or broken only by a breath. Beneath the inhaling and exhaling quality of the phrases, Pärt almost always sustains the sonority through the use of underlying drones. The ends of most of the movements are marked attaca, moving the work along a long, unbroken continuum. Even in the more contrapuntal and rhythmically active instrumental passages, there is a lack of syncopation, dotted notes, or other forms of rhythmic complexity.  

Although the impact of the drone is felt initially in the realm of pitch and tonality, its constant presence also affects the listener’s perception of motion, rhythm, and time. The ison

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8 Pärt is not reflecting medieval sensibilities here if one considers the complex rhythms found in later medieval motets.
shifts several times from the tonal center of D, to A and then back again. Although these changes occur over many minutes, a subtle sense of movement away from and back to D may be perceived ‘under the surface.’ The drone also provides a backdrop for sounds of shorter duration; it provides a link from one unit of sound to the next (and a link from one movement to the next). It is as though *Te Deum* encompasses the entire spectrum of duration. On the one hand, the listener experiences such long durations that they might be described as non-rhythmic or anti-rhythmic, while at the same time, hearing carefully manipulated units of shorter durations, within the framework of a constant pulse. It has been noted that the *ison* is considered by Orthodoxy to represent eternity. Pärt’s rhythmic choices, from the fundamental quarter note to the drone, reflect his absorption with the relation of things spiritual to things temporal.

*Formal Results.* *Te Deum* is a through-composed work of seventeen movements of like nature. Pärt initiates an organic process that grows along an unfolding continuum, presenting constantly new materials derived from a unchanging rhythmic and melodic vocabulary. Hillier claims that the structure grows out of the text; the process and the form are one and the same, “Above all, the music unfolds a single process which is both form and content, foreground and background, inside and outside, at the same time. The musical process is not only transparent, but is the music’s object-subject in one” (Hillier, 1997, p. 15).

Pärt’s attention to structure, design and form appears at its most obvious in the details, in the note-to-note unfolding of the two-voiced tintinnabuli approach. Each phrase is tightly organized and balanced, melodically and rhythmically. There is a concinnity of details, a symbiotic or interdependent relationship between text, melody and rhythm.
In the tintinnabuli responses by chorus and orchestra, the phrases are combined to form sections or ‘paragraphs;’ each paragraph usually corresponds with a verse of text. The activity level generally remains constant within each section. The dynamic level, the tempo and the timbre of each paragraph also remain constant, and there is distinct closure at the end of every section. This results in the aural perception of clearly articulated block structures. There is no dramatic growth or progression within each block, and there is no development as defined by the sonata form tradition. Every phrase is new: different in melody, rhythm and length.

Pärt follows the same general pattern in each movement. Reflecting a familiar liturgical practice, he presents each verse of the hymn in an antiphonal fashion. After a chant-like rendition of the hymn verse by only a few voices, a larger ensemble then reiterates the verse. The verse and response are related melodically and it would seem that Pärt composes the M-voice of the response first, and then derives the chant material from that melody. This approach provides a unity and cohesion between the sections within the movement.

In each movement, we find changes of texture, timbre, meter, dynamics and tempi. There is a subtle growth or intensification from the non-metric, one or two-voiced opening of each movement to the full choir/string ensemble response. Even when there are several chant portions within the movement, the movement is always concluded with a full-textured response. The activity within each movement fluctuates gradually, alternating between non-metric and metric passages.

It has been pointed out that the rhythmic units, phrases, and sections vary greatly in length; therefore the movements themselves also vary considerably in length and scope. Text considerations appear to be the guiding factor in Pärt’s structural decisions, but it is important to
note that the instrumental portions, not bound by text, are often fairly lengthy and provide extensive time for reflection.

While the overall effect is one of stability and subtle change, there are moments of great impact in which the text appears to demand an intensity of expression. These three dynamic and textural peaks are found in Movements IV, IX and XV.

There is no evidence of a large formal structure that is independent of textual considerations. Because *Te Deum* is woven from a tight and uniform fabric, the individual movements would not function well as independent, shorter works.

*Sound:* Arvo Pärt makes relatively conventional choices in assembling his forces for *Te Deum.* The vocal forces include a small men's ensemble (TB), a small treble ensemble (SA) as well as a mixed (SATB) chorus (chamber ensembles are used in the recordings). Joining the vocal groups is a string ensemble (vI,vII, va, vc, cb: sections, not soloists). No exotic or extended techniques are required in the string or vocal parts.

A wind harp and prepared piano represent less conventional sonorities employed by Pärt. While there are no descriptive notes accompanying the score or recording, the publisher provides a recording of the wind harp for use in performance. The resulting sonority is that of an electronically manipulated drone, vibrating at the lowest possible octaves of A and D. On the piano, the strings for four pitches of the D minor triad are altered with metal screws. The rest of the piano is to be played with no alterations. The piano part is not integral in presenting melodic materials, but plays occasional chords that serve as percussive punctuation marks, often between movements.

By the end of Movement III, all of the performing forces have been introduced, the small “chant” choir, the SATB choir and the string ensemble. Each ensemble appears alternately in
clearly delineated sections, sometimes alone and sometimes in combination but no new timbres are introduced after the first movement. The regular alternating of forces contribute substantially to an overall rhythm of contrast and unity. While each movement alternates between forces, the tintinnabuli approach lends a ‘similarity of sonority’ from phrase to phrase, section to section and movement to movement.

The range and tessitura of the voice and string parts are conventional. Although the ensembles remain in a moderate range (the strings are treated quite idiomatically, with the first violins playing in their top octaves), the rumble of the *ison* or drone contributes to a wide aural spectrum, adding depth and weight to the more conventional ranges of the ensembles.

In a departure from earlier tintinnabuli works, Pärt provides specific dynamic markings for each section in *Te Deum*. The changes are often subtle; *crescendi* and *diminuendi* are indicated only in the string passages. The voice parts are assigned to a dynamic level at the beginning of each section and that level remains unchanged until a new section begins. This creates a somewhat one-dimensional quality, with no dynamic variation within a phrase, or from one phrase to the next within a section. The ensembles are combined or layered for moments of greater impact. Pärt often uses this ‘terraced dynamics’ technique to build toward a dynamic climax, but he never reduces forces in the same way.

The general range of dynamics lies between *piano* and *mezzo forte*. The only true *forte* sections lie in four movements, of which Movement VII is the biggest (***ff***). Major dynamic contrasts lie within movements, although almost every movement begins softer than the ending of the previous movement. The *ison* is also marked with specific and substantial dynamic changes.
Silence: Silence is an integral element in the compositional technique of Arvo Pärt. *Te Deum* opens with a *pppp* marking and ends with the same *pppp*: emerging from silence and returning to silence. The use of rests provides breathing space between phrases and sections, and contributes to a reflection on the relationship between sound and the silence that surrounds it. Silence can be limited to the length of a breath, or to a specific duration within the context of a phrase. There are no indefinite or long periods of silence occurring outside of the rhythmic structure. Silence would appear to be a salient feature in much of Pärt’s oeuvre and it reflects a distinctly non-western ethos in which moments of silence are imbued with rich meaning and experience, as rich as the sonorities they envelop. The composer poses this question, “How can one fill the time with notes worthy of the preceding silence?” (Arvo Pärt, 1988, p. 337).

Texture: A striking quality of tintinnabuli lies in its relatively homogeneous texture. In simple terms: all is melody; all is harmony. The familiar melody/accompaniment distinction appearing in much of western music is not to be found. Pärt does provide subtle shifts, however, between the homorhythmic nature of the voice parts and the more contrapuntal character emerging in the string parts. In the tutti passages, the strings essentially double the voice parts and Pärt is sparing in his use of solo voices or instruments. There is only one instance where a solo voice is used (*Movement XII*, #[59]) followed by solo strings (*Movement XII*, #[60]).

Tintinnabuli is essentially a two-voiced texture, but M and T- voices may be added or subtracted within this flexible framework. Pärt provides a surprising variety of textures in the antiphonal relationship between the different ensembles, in the clearly articulated blocks of timbres and in the addition or layering of voices that serve to underline moments of greater impact.
Each of the 17 movements takes the listener from a perception of horizontal activity to one of increasing density as the score proceeds from unison voices to a multi-voiced texture, either mixed voices, strings or tutti at the end of each movement. The passages of greatest variety in rhythmic and melodic language occur when all forces are employed simultaneously. *Te Deum* moves from monophonic passages of simple rhythmic patterns to a homorhythmic texture, sometimes contrasted with the more polyrhythmic or contrapuntal texture in the strings. Constant changes in textural fabric often correspond with the shifts between metrical and non-metrical sections.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, Pärt has created a unique sound world and a substantial musical composition using a spare ration of melodic and rhythmic materials. His trademark tintinnabuli technique results in an impression of constant but minute change, a relentless tonality aided by the ubiquitous presence of the triad. Constantly shifting colors and textures of rich sonorities contrast with moments of silence that provide breathing space for the ear as well as for the spirit.

Pärt has deliberately limited his choices, in order to avoid obscuring a text of great complexity and magnitude. *Te Deum* is not a personal, expressive interpretation of an ancient hymn. Instead it renders a musical experience that invites the listener to find his own meeting point with these reflections on man and his Creator.

**John Tavener’s *Ikon of Light***

He saw nothing but light all around him, and did not know whether he was standing on the ground…Instead he was wholly in the presence of immaterial light, and seemed to himself to have turned into light.

St. Simeon the New Theologian (Stewart, 1994, p. 3)
Introduction: The following discussion will first provide a general description of John Tavener's *Ikon of Light*, followed by a review of the literature and a brief performance history. Analysis of this work will focus on the three distinct ways in which Tavener derives the melodic material for *Ikon of Light*. Next, an examination will be made of the relation between text and rhythm, and the formal structures that emerge from these elements. A study of the prominent role of sonority and silence in *Ikon of Light* will complete the analysis. This discussion will be guided by the principles of music analysis set forth by Allen Forte in *The Structure of Atonal Music* and Jan La Rue’s *Guidelines for Style Analysis*.

The inception of *Ikon of Light* occurred with Tavener's discovery of a poem by St. Simeon entitled *Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit*. St. Simeon was a "rather obscure voluntary exile in Asia Minor," who lived from 942 to 1022 A.D. (Tavener, 1999, p. 49). Peter Phillips describes St. Simeon as one of the greatest mystical writers in the history of the Orthodox Church (Phillips, 1991, p.3).

. Tavener was especially struck by the imagery and intensity of light in St. Simeon's poetry. One of Tavener's favorite images comes from St Simeon's description of God as 'uncreated light,' and the composer describes this 'uncreated light' as the light appearing to Christ on Mount Tavor, the light that shines in saints (Tavener, 1999, p. 49).

*Ikon Of Light* is a work in seven movements, composed for double choir (SATB, SATB) and string trio. This forty minute work is a setting of a number of Greek texts: The Byzantine hymn "*Trisagion,*" "Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit," and the words "*fôs*" (Light), "*doxa*" (Glory), and "*epiphania*" (Shining Forth). The three outer movements, I, II, III and V, VI, VII encircle the central movement (IV), which is the setting of St. Simeon's *Mystic Prayer to the*

*Ikon of Light* alternates between passages reminiscent of Byzantine chant, dense contrapuntal sections, and vertical blocks of tone clusters alternating with periods of silence (some have described these episodes as ‘pillars of light’). Changes in texture are accompanied by intense extremes in dynamics, always punctuated by silence. The string trio provides a contrast in color and texture, adding the dimension of distance and space to *Ikon of Light* (Tavener indicates that the trio is to be placed in another room).

Tavener describes the two contrasting forces that appear in *Fos* I (Movement I) and *Fos* II (Movement VI). The string trio represents the soul yearning for God while the choir represents God in his uncreated energies. The string trio plays a ‘yearning chord,’ which is answered by the choir singing the ‘joy/sorrow chord’.10 This conversation is repeated six times; each *Fos* is sung for a longer duration, “until it becomes expanded light, separated from all yet united to all” (Tavener, 1999, p. 50). Tavener also depicts his unique concept of ‘uncreated light’ through his use of periods of silence.

Movements III and V are closely related in texture and approach. “Doxa” (Movement III) consists of long, dense phrases sung by a double choir, each phrase set to the word *doxa* or ‘glory.’ Movement V, “Epiphania,” is constructed in much the same way. These two movements display one of Tavener’s favorite devices, the palindrome, in which “the melody reaches a central point and then proceeds backward.” (Phillips, 1991, p. 3)

The third and fifth movements are settings of an ancient Byzantine hymn, *Trisagion.* Using Byzantine chant-like melodies, Tavener first presents the hymn in unison. The chant is then repeated, this time accompanied by two other voices. The string trio follows with a

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10 This chord is discussed in detail on page 13 of this document.
harmonized variation of the chant melody. The melody and voicings are altered the second time *Trisagion* appears in Movement V.

Longer than all of the other movements combined, the fourth and central movement, “Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit,” consists of chant-like melodies passed around from voice to voice, supported by drones. The melodies are derived serially from what Tavener describes as a ‘magic square.’ These melodies are treated in inversion and in retrograde motion in both a monodic and canonic texture throughout the movement.

Tavener asks that the work “unfold as a ritual in musical terms, attempting to express the inexpressible” (Stewart, 1994, p. 4). He claims, “I was writing for the first time about spiritual states of being” (Tavener, 1999, p. 50), and he requests that the work be performed with ‘restraint and majesty’ (Haydon, 1997, p. 170).

In composing *Ikon Of Light*, Tavener expressed disappointment that he was experiencing St. Simon ‘second-hand,’ and that systems still abounded in his music. As he implies, there is a formulaic approach in the use of the magic square and in the manipulation of melodic cells which knit together Mvts. I, II, VI and VII. The use of the palindrome for large and small structures dictates the return of familiar materials and forms and determines the structure of *Ikon of Light*.

*Performance History and Literature Review:* Tavener’s chance exposure to the singing of the Tallis Scholars marked a new period of inspiration for Tavener, as well as a new collaboration between the composer and the ensemble’s director, Peter Phillips. The second movement of *Ikon of Light*, ‘Doxa,’ began life as an independent composition. It was composed for the Tallis Scholars and was premiered by that ensemble in September of 1982 in a concert marked by a warm reception. *Guardian* critic, Meirion Bowen, described “Doxa” in this way,
“Its five sections seem to circle slowly round the text, shedding light, as it were, from all
directions” (Haydon, 1995, p. 160). Bowen’s description corresponds with Tavener’s intention
that “Doxa” represent the glory of the light (flos) filling everything with light (Tavener, 1999,
p. 50).

Two years after the first performance of “Doxa,” Ikon of Light was premiered by the
Tallis Scholars in Tewkesbury Abbey as part of the 1984 Cheltenham Festival. The work
received an enthusiastic reception, in part, owing to the thoroughly rehearsed and deeply
committed Tallis Scholars, who also had the advantage of excellent acoustics and ‘sublime
surroundings’ (Haydon, 1995, p. 175).

Kenneth Loveland (1984, p. 519) reviewed this first performance for The Musical Times
and found it to be a remarkable work. He said that it reflected Tavener’s commitment to the
Orthodox Church more than any other work written to that date. “The total effect at the premiere
was of a Byzantine ritual – exactly what the composer intended” (Loveland, 1984, p. 519).
Loveland remarks on the use of space and silence used by Tavener and on the undeniable
sincerity of both the writing and the performance. The static nature of the piece caused the
attention of both Loveland and the audience to wander, and the author wondered if Ikon of Light
would be as successful in a less sympathetic environment than Tewkesbury Abbey (Loveland,
1984, p. 519).

Of the many writers who have approached the work of John Tavener, two individuals
emerge as uniquely qualified to discuss both the composer’s approach and his compositions.
Peter Phillips, director of the Tallis Scholars, premiered and directed the first recording of Ikon
of Light.\footnote{On hearing the recording, French critic Didier Louis described Ikon of Light as ‘one of the great religious works of the late 20th century.’} He also collaborated with the composer on numerous performances of other Tavener
works. Ivan Moody, also an adherent to the Greek Orthodox tradition, is the author of the article, “John Tavener,” in the second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary*. He is also the co-author (with John Tavener and Mother Thekla) of the book *Ikons: Meditations in Words and Music* (1994).

Peter Phillips (1991, p. 3) describes *Ikon of Light* as ritualistic at several levels, from the simple repetition of small bits of material to a balanced overall scheme involving repetition. His comments on the symbolism of the work provide this insight, “The religious symbolism behind the text of *Ikon of Light* is at once straightforward and complex to understand; the idea of light is easily comprehensible, but what it represents for St. Simeon is not” (Phillips, 1991, p.3). Phillips describes how Tavener keeps the musical material simple and straightforward to allow the complexities of the poetry to speak for themselves. He feels that this occurs in the central movement “Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit” in which a very long text is presented within a ‘loose shape’ (Phillips, 1984, p. 385). There are, however, occasions when Tavener is moved to intensify the vision with more complex music (Phillips, 1991, p. 3). Phillips describes what he feels are two different solutions combining to make the work comprehensible to an audience. First, Tavener “creates a soundworld that describes the concept of ‘Glory… secondly; he allows the words to speak for themselves “adorned with melody” (Phillips, 1984, p. 385).

Michael Stewart (1994) explains that *Ikon* has been described as one of Tavener’s most mystical works because the symbolism is at once very simple and very complex. He describes ‘uncreated light’ as neither a physical light nor a purely metaphorical light. Stewart quotes Father Kallistos Ware, “a light that can be seen by a man through physical eyes, provided that his senses have been transformed by divine grace.” It “lies beyond the imagination, it belongs to the infinite and the eternal where human speech can only point or hint” (Stewart, p. 4).
Phillips claims that Tavener’s focus on the elements of silence and sonority sets him apart from many other composers (Phillips, 1991 p. 3). While Tavener uses ‘closely argued mathematics for the movement “Doxa,”’ Phillips claims that it is not the details of the compositional scheme, but rather the resulting sonorities and the carefully marked silences that create the impact (Phillips, 1998, p. 385). David Wright perceives the harshly dissonant outer movements and the blocks of silence as a challenge to the listener, describing the blocks of silence as ‘equal in importance’ to the ‘choral shouts’ that frame them (Wright, 1994, p. 393).

In the search for musical antecedents and influences, Moody and Phillips claim that they are far and few between. They find connections only to Byzantine chant and medieval Russian polyphony. Tavener provides evidence of this in his instructions to the choir to not sing the Byzantine hymn, “Trisagion” in a western manner. (Phillips, 1991 p. 3). “Trisagion” is an original musical setting by Tavener, to be sung in Byzantine chant style (Stewart, 1994, p. 4). Tavener harmonizes this chant in Russian style. Another Russian/Byzantine influence can be found in the ubiquitous drone, appearing in Ikon of Light and in so many of Tavener’s other compositions. Michael Stewart claims that the vocal drone used in movements II, IV, and VII represents timelessness and the eternal (Stewart, 1994, p. 4).

Haydon (1995) underlines the importance of the ikon tradition in Tavener’s approach to composing Ikon. He says, “John wanted to do as the ikon painter does: “to work strictly within the confines of a Sacred Tradition creating compositions free of novelty but filled with serenity. He loved the Orthodox definition of ikons as ‘windows into heaven’” (Haydon, 1995, p.170).

Phillips (1984, p. 385) claims that it is Tavener’s natural gifts of a strong melodic sense and a sure ear for texture that help him meet the challenges of communicating from one culture

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12 Geoffrey Haydon describes this movement as incorporating “the traditional Byzantine melody,” (Haydon, 170) but there is no other evidence that Tavener used a pre-existing melody. It is most likely that Haydon is describing a melody that is in the traditional Byzantine chant style.
to another. Another scholar, Brian Morton, considers *Ikon of Light* to be representative of Tavener’s corpus,

The *Ikon of Light* for chorus and string trio is perhaps his finest and most approachable single work. It has all the profound, mystical resonance of the later works, but in a simpler and less forbidding vein. Its yearning quality makes it instantly appealing and it has been effectively recorded.” (Morton, 1992, p. 916)

*Melody:* There are three distinctly different approaches to melody in *Ikon of Light*, resulting in dramatic contrasts throughout the work. The two four outer movements, I, II and VI, VII will be examined using principles of set theory. It is here that Tavener manipulates 5-note melodic cells to create large, dissonant blocks of sound. For the fourth movement, the composer implements a serial approach in deriving the melodic material while Movements III and V are comprised by a three-voice chant in the traditional Byzantine style.

Movements I, II, VI and VII consist of numerous phrases constructed of five-note melodic motives or cells. The use of pitch class set analysis for these movements assists in determining the relationships between the materials within and between these four movements.

The first movement, “Fos,” consists of choral outbursts responding to the string trio playing sustained three-note chords consisting of two pitch classes, G and A-flat. The choir sings chords made up of the pitch classes E-flat, F, G, and A-flat. These pitch classes can also be identified as pc set 4-11, (0135) with an interval vector of [121110] (See Fig.3-14). The choir sings these two sets of superimposed thirds (E-flat/G, F/A-flat) six times. The string trio plays two different pitch classes with each entrance: after reflecting the E-flat/G and F/A-flat in the vocal parts, the trio then presents four other pairs of pitches. By the end of “Fos”, all 12 tones have been heard between the vocal and instrumental parts. The last eight pitches played by the trio, if combined into a set, could be described as the complement to pc set 4-11.
“Fos II” is a repetition of “Fos I” except that fragments of a descending c minor scale ‘weep’ out of the soprano and tenor parts (pc set 4-11), first two notes, then three, etc. until the end of the movement.

In the second movement, “Doxa,” Tavener introduces a new pc set, 5-Z12 (01356) by adding the pitch class D to the pc set 4-11, used in the first movement. 5-Z12 has an interval vector of [222121] (Fig. 3-15). The composer presents the set horizontally and canonically throughout the voices of the double choir. Two other sets provide material for Movement II; pitch classes B, C, D, E-flat and F (01346), 5-10 and B, F-sharp, G-sharp (025), 3-7. Z-12 and 5-10 share cardinality and an R2 and Rp relationship while 3-7 is a subset of both Z-12 and 5-10. (It will be noted later in the discussion that 3-7 is a subset of all of the other pc sets employed throughout Ikon of Light by Tavener. In this movement the sets are manipulated with transposition, retrograde and inversion techniques. Tavener transposes the pc sets used in Movement II for Movement VII, “Epiphania” (See Fig. 3-16).

Chromaticism, wide ranges, high tessitura, and angular leaps characterize the melodic phrases. A double choir is employed in these movements and the second choir sings the same material as the first, beginning four beats later. This canonic treatment introduces an element of repetition and creates such a dense texture that recognizable melodic lines are all but obscured.

Trisagion is the name of one of the most commonly sung Byzantine hymns, and in the two appearances of this hymn (Mvts. III and V), Tavener utilizes a traditional Byzantine chant style. There is no evidence of a formulaic scheme in this movement. The chant melody in “Trisagion I” is primarily stepwise and can be identified as being based on pc set (02357), 5-23, or as a segment of the G Phrygian mode. The chant is first presented in unison by the bass voice. It is then accompanied by the Tenor voice moving in parallel motion at a perfect fifth above the
melody, and by the Bass II voice, beginning on the same pitch as the chant, but moving in mirror/contrary motion to the chant. Tavener adds accidentals in the harmonizing voices to maintain the exact interval distance from the chant melody (See Fig. 3-17). The string trio response to “Trisagion I” is taken from the vocal material in “Trisagion II,” and the trio episode following “Trisagion II” repeats the material from the voice parts in “Trisagion I.” “Trisagion II” reverses the role of the voices; the chant now appears in the soprano, while the tenor harmonizes at the fourth below and the bass line moves in contrary motion to the chant.

The longest movement in *Ikon of Light* is found in the center of the work, “Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit.” The melodic materials in this fourth movement are derived formulaically. A significant unifying device lies in the fact that all of the phrases in the A section (Movement IVa) begin with a descending scalar pattern, the phrases ascend in the second section (Movement IVc) while the descending patterns return in the final section (Movement IVe).

Tavener’s fascination with ancient Greek and Byzantine musical traditions extends to his use of formulas to determine melodic content. Tavener uses what he calls a ‘magic square’ or ‘Byzantine palindrome’ to arrive at the melodic material in movement IV. Actually neither Byzantine nor Greek, the palindrome is an arrangement of Latin letters that can be read either forward and backward, or up and down, to reveal the same message. Upon applying a pitch to each of the eight letters, Tavener uses different combinations of these letters/pitches to establish melodic materials for the movement “Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit” (See Fig. 3-18).

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13 Tavener may be influenced here by the Russian ‘choral chant’ tradition in which voices move in parallel motion to the chant (Phillips, 1991, p.3)

14 Tavener tracked this magic square to Moldenhauer’s life of Webern, page 431. The meaning of the Latin appears to be immaterial, “Arepo the sower holds the wheels for his work.” (Haydon, 1997, p.164).
Movement IV, "Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit," is a long movement that is divided into five parts. A brief discussion of each part follows below.

**Part 1:** Vocal forces (m. 1): Each phrase in "Mystic Prayer" begins with the word *elthe* or "Come." Tavener takes the pitches assigned to the word SATOR from the Magic Square and uses these pitches to devise a melody for the first word in the prayer, "elthe." The pitches are G F E D C and they render a strong C major tonality to the passage (Movement IVa, at the beginning of measure 1, 2, 3, etc.). The words following *elthe*, "to fos to alithinon," are set to the pitches C D E F G, assigned to the word ROTAS, (second half, m. 1). The SATOR-ROTAS melody is passed to each voice part, then Tavener moves on to use the pitches F C A B D from AREPO [Letter H], D B A C F from OPERA [Letter I] and finally E A C A E from TENET [J]. In each phrase, the text after the word *elthe* is set to pitches that correspond to the next word in the Magic Square. Although this would appear to be a straightforward compositional process, microtonal decorations (not notated, but dictated to singers by Tavener in rehearsal) and other melodic elaborations tend to obscure the process (See Fig. 3-19).

**Part 2:** String Trio, (Movement IVb or [N]): The palindrome is presented with pitches from the magic square words in their original order: SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS (the mid-point of the palindrome occurs at rehearsal letter P on the pitch class C corresponding to the N in TENET). A five-note musical phrase is derived from the five pitches/letters in each word, and each phrase is separated by a four second interval of silence. A slight separation is indicated between each pitch played by the strings, effectively reducing any sense of linear or 'horizontal' motion.

**Part 3:** Vocal forces (Movement IVc or [S]): The magic square is used in inversion and transposed to a G-minor tonality. Each phrase begins with *elthe*, this time set to the pitches
corresponding to the word ROTAS – G A B-flat C D, and for the text following “elthe,” Tavener follows the same procedure as for Part 1 or Movement IVa.

Part 4: String Trio (Letter W): The palindrome is presented in inversion, and in canon: ROTAS OPERA TENET AREPO SATOR from Magic Square 2. This can be seen most clearly in the violin part in which a new musical phrases is based on the notes corresponding to each word in the square.

Part 5: Vocal Forces and String Trio (Letter BB): Returning to the magic square used in Part I, this section is essentially a variation of Part 1. However, each phrase is imitated by the other voices, resulting in dense waves of repeated material.

The melodies resulting from the use of this magic square are tonally stable and this tonality is reinforced with the use of drones (The melodic cells or pc sets found in Mvt.IV are shown on Fig. 3-20). Two out of five phrases in the palindrome create either a major or minor 5-tone scale (SATOR= GFEDC, ROTAS=G A B-flat C D). These pitch combinations result in melodies that are simple and scalar in shape, the repetition of the G F E D C pattern in Part 1 results in sweeping descents at the beginning of every new line of text, while the pattern G A B-flat C D of Part 3 creates an ascent at the beginning of every new phrase. Tavener increases melodic activity with angular lines and leaping intervals, and by creating a canononic texture in Part 5. The outer voice parts are noted for their wide ranges and extreme tessituras. There are no counter melodies or secondary themes in Movement IV, and with a high degree of similarity from phrase to phrase, the effect is that of continuous repetition.

By the end of Movement IV, all of the melodic material in Ikon of Light has been presented. The melodic patterns derived from the Magic Square can be also be represented as pc
sets and Fig. 3-21 compares all of the melodic material found in *Ikon of Light* in the form of pc sets.

While there is a particularly strong relationship between the outer movements of I, II and VI, VII, Tavener provides melodic links between all of the movements. The pc set, 4-11, central to movements I and VI, and pc set 3-7, found in the second, fourth and seventh movements are subsets of all of the other sets employed in *Ikon of Light*. The pc set (02457) maintains a strong presence in the central portion of the work, appearing in Movement III, at the beginning and end of Movement IV and again in Movement V. *Ikon of Light* closes with a return to the pc sets found at the beginning of the work (such as 0135) and (01356) completing a circle of melodic relationships. Another unifying factor may be found in the fact that all of the pc sets (except for the subsets of 4-11 and 3-7) share a cardinality of 5. When Tavener uses pc set (025), he repeats two of the pitches in order to maintain the five-note phrase structure. A comparison of the interval vectors in Figure 3-21 show only one set of pc sets which share similarity relations (Z-12 and 5-10).

While Tavener’s music is often described as tonal, identifying one central tonality in *Ikon of Light* becomes an elusive task. “Fos,” (I, VI) “Doxa”(II) and “Epiphania”(VII) do not share the tonal stability of “Trisagion” (III, V) and “Mystic Prayer” (IV), in which the triad pedal points underline the tonality found in the melodic material. Modality shifts between C major and G minor in “Mystic Prayer.” An examination of the tonal movement in general would indicate G as a prominent point of reference in the outer movements, with an excursion to C in Movement IV.

Tavener moves from a cluster of four pitches in vertical alignment in the two outside movements to a linear presentation of the related melodic material in the central movements.
(Mvts. II, VII). It is as though the full spectrum of sound is laid out before the listener at the beginning of *Ikon of Light*, followed by a narrowing of focus to one tonality at a time in the middle of *Ikon of Light*. As the work progresses the perspective changes again, panning back out to the full spectrum of tonal possibilities at the end of the *Ikon of Light*.

The last two movements, “Fos II” (VI) and “Epiphania” (VII) contain highly dissonant material, both movements begin on G’s, and, after permutations through dense chromatic phrases, there is a return to G in the strings and soprano with a C lingering in the bass as a final tonality. Figure 3-22 displays the prominent pitches and tonal centers in *Ikon of Light*.

Vertical sonorities provide a tremendous source of color and tension in *Ikon of Light*. The tension produced by the dissonance clusters is not resolved in the form of a harmonic progression but instead, absorbed by the silence that follows each chord/cluster.

Tavener uses two different vertical materials in *Ikon of Light*, the superimposed thirds described as pc set (0135) and G major and minor triads (found in the drones in Movement IV). These materials contrast between the pc set (0135) which is highly dissonant, and the triads which produce an unrelenting tonality. Tavener shares with Arvo Pärt a fondness for the ‘complete’ quality of the major/minor triad, along with an absence of interest in using harmonic progressions to move to or from the ‘tonic’ triad. There are no dominant or other primary chords in *Ikon of Light*, resulting in a predictable absence of harmonic rhythm.

The superimposed thirds that make up both pc set (0135) and (01356) appear in both a horizontal and vertical form throughout *Ikon of Light* (See Fig. 3-14 and 3-16). They find vertical form in Mvts.I and VI. Tavener has named (0135) the “Joy/Sorrow Chord,” and this trademark device of Tavener’s finds its most famous manifestation in the anthem “The Lamb” (Haydon, 1995, p. 170). Because “Doxa” was composed first as a separate composition, it may be logical
to conclude that the pitch material for Movements I, II, VI, and VII, was generated from the original melodic cell in “Doxa.”

Tavener uses vertical sonorities and textures to achieve the drama and contrast necessary for a large work (especially in the absence of rhythmic variety and harmonic movement). He chooses very dense textures covering a wide pitch range, and by layering voices canonically, Tavener creates ever-thicker textures and sonorities in Movement IV.

The use of the drone, and multiple drones in the form of triads (Movement IV) add to the vertical sonority and to the many tonal implications throughout this work.

*Text and Rhythm:* Tavener insists on that the presentation of the text is paramount in his composition,

Sacred music must be able to be in some way sung, because from a Christian point of view the Word must be heard. Music is the extension of the Word, not a frilly decoration of the Word. It is at the service of the Word, as in all great traditions. There must be no harmony, no counterpoint, just a single melodic line with an ison...representing eternity. (Tavener, 1999, p. 47)

The pre-eminent role played by text is underscored by the order in which Tavener arranges his movements. The strict symmetry demanded by a palindrome is altered in order to provide a more logical and meaningful order to the text. The form of the movements is ABCDCAB. Typically Tavener would typically employ the form ABCDCBA (a traditional palindrome). However, the order of A (*f*os – Light) and B (*doxa*-Glory) are reversed at the end, for “Doxa” has been replaced by the word “Epiphania,” which means “Shining Forth.” The composer explains, “without *Doxa* (Glory) and *Fos* (Light) an *Epiphania* really cannot take place” (Stewart, 1994, p. 4).

There is an obvious element of traditional text painting in the way that Tavener depicts the Greek word for light, *f*os. He presents his melodic materials vertically, as though presenting
all of the 12 pitches in the spectrum at once. Beginning in m. 5, the strings provide the remaining eight pitches to the choirs’ four pitches. The spectrum of pitches runs parallel to the image of rays of light displaying all of the colors in the spectrum. The rays spill out over a larger and larger space as the dynamic level and duration increases with each repetition. Upon the return of “Fos” at the end of *Ikon of Light*, Tavener adds even more color and texture by including successively longer scalar patterns that descend from the top pitch of the tone blocks.

The “Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit” is a long poem, non-metered, and with phrases of greatly varying lengths. Tavener adjusts the lengths of each musical phrase accordingly, resulting in a movement comprised of highly uneven phrase lengths. This is an obvious parallel to chant tradition, in which meter and regular phrase lengths are conspicuously absent. In this movement, Tavener adheres to the traditional relationship between text and melody found in chant in which clarity of text is of paramount importance. It is important to note that there is no text-painting in the setting of this poem which contains such rich imagery and color. It is as though Tavener has deliberately chosen to allow the text to ‘speak for itself.’ The apparent spontaneity and unpredictability of the vocal lines is in contrast to the regular length of the string interludes and the silences that articulate them.

The numerical significance found in the melodic cells, phrases, sections and movements has already been alluded to. Tavener discusses his use of symbolism in his book *The Music of Silence* (1999). There is nothing subtle or hidden about the extra-musical references in *Ikon of Light*. According to John Tavener, all musical elements have a metaphysical meaning or reference. The composer claims that in this composition, he is, for the first time, “writing about spiritual states of being” (p. 50). He has a number of unique concepts about light and creation which are directly related to elements in *Ikon of Light*. In “Fos” the string trio represents a
"yearning for God. The choir represents God in his "uncreated energies." (Tavener, 1999, p. 50). The joy/sorrow chord that the choir sings on the word 'light' cuts off the yearning chord. Tavener describes this as an 'expanded light separated from all yet united to all' (Tavener, 1999, p.50). He claims that "Doxa" symbolizes the glory of the light filling everything with light and that the use of silence is another way of representing "uncreated light" (Tavener, 1999, p.50). Explanations of the terms "uncreated energies," and "uncreated light" are not forthcoming. Tavener ends his comments on Ikon of Light with the following quote attributed to a Russian nobleman so St. Seraphim of Sarov, "I cannot look at you, Father, because the light pouring from your eyes blinds me" (1999, p. 51).

Another element fraught with symbolism is the drone or ison, the acoustic representation of the silence of God, the silence of eternity and the Divine Presence. The isons or drones in Ikon of Light are sung, unlike the instrumental isons in Pärt's Te Deum.

In the Byzantine tradition, it is considered a great honor to sing the drone because it represents the eternal (this sentiment is not always shared by western singers) (Tavener, 1999, p. 154).

John Tavener’s music is known for its slow tempi, its lack of rhythmic complexity, and lack of motion. Ikon of Light is no exception. The four outer movements appear almost rhythmless, with sustained chords or melodies assigned to long durations and divided by specified periods of silence. The central movements flow freely in chant-like passages, emancipated from any regular metricity.

Tavener uses a simple and limited rhythmic vocabulary. Using a predominance of very long durations in the outside movements, Tavener employs rhythmic augmentation and diminution at the same time, to create a dense, polyphonic texture in Movements II and VII (See
Fig. 3-15, mm. 1-6). He makes use of eighth and sixteenth note notes for the movements inspired by the Byzantine chant tradition in Movements III, IV and V. Tavener makes interesting use of rhythmic augmentation in the movement, Fos, where the duration of each chord is twice the length of the preceding one. The greatest variety of rhythmic notation is found in Movement IV where the ornaments and flourishes add to the rhythmic interest of the passage. (As shown in Fig. 3-19) These active melodic lines create an element of rhythmic contrast to the timeless, sustained character of the ever-present drones.

Although Tavener does provide meter signatures for the two outside movements (I-VI=8/4, II-VII=4/2), there are several factors working against an aural perception of beat groupings. The tempi are so slow and the durations are so long that divisions of the beat are far apart and difficult to perceive. Metric perception is also obscured by the periods of silence inserted at regular intervals throughout these movements.

"Trisagion I," "Trisagion II" and "Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit" are in a free meter as the text determines the length of the phrases. Bar lines are inserted to guide points of arrival or stress. The effect is one of non-metered chant, with undulating lines, ebbing and flowing between points of activity/stress and points of calm/lull.

Slow tempi are a signature element of Tavener's compositional output and Ikon of Light provides no exception. The composer's choice of tempi may be selected from an 'ethos' of meditation and prayer, and in consideration for acoustical properties. Tavener likens the sense of static motion found in his music to a parallel quality found in Orthodox icons. He resists any sense of hurry, manipulating the rhythmic and metrical qualities of Ikon of Light to allow the listener to enter into an attitude of reflection and stillness.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} Tavener has suffered from heart disease for many years and requires medication to slow his heartbeat. This propensity for slow tempi may be influenced by his physical condition (Haydon, 1995).
**Formal Structures:** John Tavener decries the fact that systems abound in *Ikon of Light*, and he states that his goal is to be rid of art-music approaches,

In both *Ikon of Light* and *Eis Thanaton* I was still using systems. I thought I had achieved something in these two pieces, but I still had not rid myself totally of modernism; music-making organized and articulated according to the closed world of ‘art for art’s sake’. I still found this unsatisfactory; I had to find a way in which to organize and articulate my music according to a different level of reality, beyond music itself. (1999, p. 55)

Tavener has always been intensely committed to symmetry and balance in his compositions. He is particularly fond of the palindrome, a form in which the materials are the same, whether read backwards or forwards. The overall form of *Ikon of Light* is a modified palindrome; several movements, sections within movements and phrases also exhibit this structure (as shown in Fig. 3-23). There are several smaller palindromes within the large form. They appear in movements, sections and as individual melodic phrases in *Doxa* and *Epiphania* (see Fig. 3-24)

The number of sections within movements II, IV and VII correspond to the number of pitches in each movement’s representative pc set (five pitches in a phrase result in a five-phrase passage). Movements I, III, V and VI are built in units of three or multiples of three, the number traditionally representing the Trinity. The total number of seven movements reflects the biblical tradition in which the number seven symbolizes perfection. There are tight numerical relationships in this work, carefully organized, but difficult to perceive aurally owing to the length and slow tempi of the work.

The end of each movement is clearly articulated by periods of silence, as are the sections within the movements. Each movement contrasts dramatically with the preceding movement
and there is complete closure between each movement. This would allow individual movements to stand on their own as independent musical compositions ("Doxa" was written and performed as an independent composition before the conception of *Ikon of Light*).

A pervasive simplicity emerges upon examination of the large and small forms in *Ikon of Light*. Tavener’s structures and techniques are quite transparent and are used over and over again throughout the work. The manipulation of melodic materials through inversion and retrograde (paralleling the larger palindromes), the use of a reduced tonal palette, augmentation and diminution of durations, and an overall impression of ritual repetition might serve to support the minimalist label that is sometimes attached to Tavener’s approach.

Another feature that resonates in much of Tavener’s music lies in the quality of stasis that surrounds *Ikon of Light*. There is a lack of anticipation, there are few links from one movement to the next, and there is really no sense of arrival. Instead there are several moments of dynamic and textural intensity, but again, no sense of progression or growth. Movement VII, “Epiphania,” does represent a final moment of enlightenment, but it represents more of a spiritual point of arrival than it does a musical climax.

Tavener provides a sense of movement by alternating moments of dissonance and consonance, and by juxtaposing contrasting textures and dynamics. While the melodic activity increases in Movement IV, the constant voice of the drone and the sustained responses by the strings inhibit any real change in the static quality of the piece. Tavener uses silence again, this time as a tool to impede forward motion or the urge to hurry on to the next musical statement.

Stability is established in part by the symmetrical nature of the lengths of sections and movements and by the predictability that ensues. A unison or triad on the prevailing tonal center
marks the end of every phrase and section in the three central movements. There is finality at the end of each phrase, section and movement in *Ikon of Light*.

Because of the finality at the end of each unit, the listener is in danger of perceiving a fragmented or disjunct musical entity. Tavener manipulates tightly organized and related cells of melodic material in a cyclic framework to provide cohesion.

*Sonority:* Descriptions such as “Pillars of Sound,” ‘luminous,’ and ‘an ocean of light’ help to illustrate the importance placed by Tavener on sonority and timbre. There is a richness, almost an opulence in the waves of vocal sound that make up *Ikon of Light*, sometimes the waves take a vertical form, at other times they take a horizontal shape.

Tavener employs large vocal forces, often divided into double choirs; SATB/SATB (Movements II, VI) or SSAA/TTBB (Movement IV). In Movements I, II, VI, VII, the thick-textured choral sonorities are foiled by a string trio that plays from either another room, or at a distance from the chorus. The ranges are quite wide for the chorus, but not for the strings. The sopranos and basses experience respectively, a high and low tessitura. Other than the instructions to sing the “Trisagion” (Movements III, V) in a non-western manner, *Ikon of Light* requires no non-traditional or extended vocal or string techniques. Contrast and drama are achieved by the alternation between the choruses, the string trio and the blocks of silence that separate them.

There are fundamental fabric changes throughout *Ikon of Light*. The outside movements are more homophonic in texture while the long middle movement, IV, is an interesting hybrid of monody and polyphony. The density of the rhythm activity is at its greatest at the end of this movement (letter [BB]).

The outside movements render a vertical perception of sonority, Movements I, and VI, are homophonic tone blocks, Movements II and VII are in eight-parts and primarily
homorhythmic in texture. Movements III and V are monodic and homorhythmic within a three-voice texture, while Movement IV presents material first in individual chant lines and later, imitatively, layering one voice after the other in waves of descending and ascending phrases. Accompanying the chant lines in Movement IV is a drone. The drone begins with a single pitch; other members of a C or G-minor triad are added, creating a gradual thickening of texture from the beginning to the end of a passage. The interaction of the chant lines with the drones creates the closest thing to a melody/accompaniment relationship to be found in *Ikon of Light*. The string parts are written and executed much like the voice parts; there are no idiomatic “orchestral” passages (the strings employ no accompanying figures, counter melodies or harmonic functions). The strings play long, sustained pitches in their low or middle ranges and the only ‘melodic’ writing occurs when the trio echoes the harmonized chant of Movements III and V. In a gesture reminiscent of terraced dynamics, Tavener adds voice parts to build toward a climax in Movement IV. However, he does not employ this device in reverse; never are the forces reduced or subtracted throughout a movement (an interesting parallel to Arvo Pärt’s approach in *Te Deum*).

It is significant that Tavener does not combine the strings with the voices except at the end of Movement IV (letter [BB]) and in the last movement. In Movement IV, the violin and viola join the voices as they play a canonic rendition of the material that they played in the first trio interlude (letter[N]). In the last movement, “Epiphania,” the string trio presents melodic phrases from “Doxa” while the choirs sing the same melodic materials in transposition.

*Dynamics:* Tavener takes advantage of the entire range of dynamic expression, from sff to pp, effectively creating a sense of drama. He replaces the conventional musical elements of tension and release found in harmonic progressions and melodic development with the use of
contrasting forces and dynamic extremes. There is a one-dimensional quality to the blocks of sound and dynamic contrasts. Like Pärt, Tavener does not indicate crescendos or decrescendos within phrases or sections. (See Fig. 3-25)

*Silence:* Another trademark of Tavener's work lies in his use of silence as a compositional element. He likens the nature of this silence to the icons in which one sees the transfixed gaze of the angels as they look upon God; a longing for God, which is somehow petrified, and silent. (1999, p. 157) Silence for Tavener means more than just the absence of sound,

I have met certain Orthodox monks – in their presence you feel that the saints of old continue to live amongst us, because, like them, they are ‘dead to the world’. ‘Dead to the world’ translates for me in the auditory terms as ‘silent music.’ (Tavener, 1999, p. 159)

David Wright, in reviewing *Ik on of Light*, submits that the blocks of silence are of equal importance to the choral ‘shouts’ that frame them (1994, p.393). Tavener not only inserts measures of rest between sections, he indicates the precise number of seconds required for each period of silence. The silence becomes another element of timbre, form and time. Tavener describes the block tone clusters as ever-expanding rays of light. In that case, does the silence surrounding them portray darkness? It is as if the ‘rays’ expand in length, traveling further through the darkness each time. The silence slows the motion of the work and imposes on the listener an atmosphere of reflection and calm.

*Space:* Tavener is careful to consider spatial and acoustic issues, both for symbolic reasons and for aural effect. He often composes with a specific performing venue and acoustic in mind (he much prefers churches) and in many of his pieces, he provides instructions for the spatial arrangement of the performing forces. In *Ik on of Light*, the string trio is to be placed either in another room or at least at a distance from the chorus and audience. The trio provides a
faint answer to the bombastic opening shouts, and for most of the work plays a subservient role to that of the vocal ensembles, inserting interludes of calm between more dramatic musical events. Instructions for the positioning of the choir in this work are not provided in the score or in any other documents regarding this work, but he does indicate that *Ikon of Light* should be performed in a building with a large acoustic so as to accommodate the periods of silence (Tavener, 1983, performance notes). The composer provides specific instructions in the score for the performance of *Doxa*:

The whole of *Doxa* must be sung as quietly as humanly possible—indeed at the threshold of audibility. In order to create this ‘unearthly’ sound, it many be necessary to place the choir in a very remote place, with the doors open or half open. During each of the five-second silences, the choir should move nearer the audience—not singing louder but becoming nearer and yet not seen. (Haydon, 1999, p.160)\(^\text{16}\)

**Conclusion:** *Ikon of Light* is a long work that places significant demands on the listener. The work is characterized by dramatic contrast, by drones, by regular ‘spaces’ in the sound, by Byzantine-like chant and by the juxtaposition of dense, highly chromatic episodes followed by relentlessly tonal passages. The element of careful organization and the manipulation of the same formal structures in both large and small proportions throughout the work belie the quality of spontaneity and freedom that greet the listener. Tavener has taken ancient prayers, full of vision and mysticism, and has found sonorities and structures to match the scope of the text.

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\(^\text{16}\) These directions were not followed at the premiere performance (Haydon, 1995 p. 160)
Mvt.I, Letter 2, Alto M-voice - accompanied by members of d triad in soprano voice (T-voice)

Figure 3-1 Tintinnabuli technique. The four modes found in the M-voice and an example of the use of the modes in the alto voice part from Movement I. [2]

Figure 3-2 Tintinnabuli technique. M-voices: alto and bass, T-voices: soprano and tenor (Movement I, immediately following opening chant)
Figure 3-3  Contrary motion found between two T-voices (soprano and tenor) Movement III, [13]
Figure 3-4  Relationship between chant melody and instrumental response, Movement VI, [25] and [26].
Figure 3-5  Chant characteristics, Movement III, [12]

Figure 3-6  Two-voiced chant, Movement VII, [43]
Figure 3-7  Instrumental response to chant, Movement III, [6]. M-voices: bass, cello II at m.5, viola at [7]. T-voice: cello I, cello II-mm.1-4.
Figure 3-8  Tutti passage, Movement IV, [15]

Figure 3-9  Chant: melismatic treatment and two-octave range, Movement XIII, [67]
Figure 3-10  Tutti passage: Materials in both D-major and D-minor. Movement IX, [54]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 syllable</th>
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<th>3 syllables</th>
<th>4 syllables</th>
<th>5 syllables</th>
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<td>₣</td>
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Te  
Sanctus  
Patrem  
Laudamus  
Aeternum  
Confitemur  
Veneratur  
Majestatis  
Aperuisti

(Latin words from the Te Deum text)

**Exceptions:** (based on pronunciation in standard Latin usage)

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Deum  
Gloriae  
Dominum  
Paraclitum  
Credentibus

Figure 3-11. Rhythmic formulae derived from text syllables and words.


Figure 3-12. Tempo markings in Te Deum. The numbers in bold represent the fastest and slowest points of tempi found in each of the three main divisions within Te Deum.
Figure 3-13 Use of rests (silence), Movement XVI, #76-77.
Pitch class set 4-11 as found in the vocal parts: 'T' indicates transposition

(0135), 4-11 (as superimposed thirds)

String trio pitches for "Fos"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode 1</th>
<th>Episode 2</th>
<th>Episode 3</th>
<th>Episode 4</th>
<th>Episode 5</th>
<th>Episode 6</th>
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<tr>
<td>mm.1-3</td>
<td>mm.5-7,</td>
<td>mm.9-11</td>
<td>mm.13-15</td>
<td>mm.17-19,</td>
<td>mm.21-23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3-14 Movement I, "Fos"
Pitch class sets stated once each in the soprano part for Episodes 1 through 5.

Fig.3-15    Mvt.II, “Doxa,” Episode 1 (mm.1-8)
Fig. 3-16 Melodic materials employed in “Epiphania,” stated once each in the soprano voice and used in varying combinations in the other voices. The pitch classes in (01356) provide the starting pitch for each successive episode.
Figure 3-17  Movement III, *Trisagion I*: Chant melody in bass 1 part. Accompanying tenor and bass 2 voices in parallel and contrary motion.
Mvt. IV, Part 2  ‘G-minor’ transposition, each word in reverse order

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{R} & \text{O} & \text{T} & \text{A} & \text{S} \\
I & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\
G & A & B_\beta & C & D \\
O & P & E & R & A \\
2 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 4 \\
A & D & F & E_\beta & C \\
T & E & N & E & T \\
3 & 6 & 8 & 6 & 3 \\
B_\beta & F & F & B_\beta & \\
A & R & E & P & O \\
4 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 2 \\
C & E_\beta & F & C & A \\
S & A & T & O & R \\
5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
D & C & B_\beta & A & G \\
\end{array}
\]

Figure 3-18  Movement IV; Magic Square

The words that form the Magic Square create a palindrome when read from top to bottom. The word TENET is itself a palindrome, as shown by the arrows above.

Example:  SATOIRAEPOTENETOPERAROTAS
Phrase 1 [F], m.3  
Text: Elthe  

Magic Square: SATOR  
Pitches: GFEDC  

Phrase 5: [H],  
Text: Elthe  

Magic Square: SATOR  
Pitches: GFEDC  

Figure 3-19  Movement 4a: Two phrases derived from the Magic Square. The circled notes correspond to the pitches assigned to the Latin words. Other notes are embellishments.
Figure 3-20  Melodic cells derived from the Latin words in the Magic Square, Movement IV.
**Movement I, Fos I**

Voices: (0135)  Interval vector [121110]  4-11 - subset of (01356), (02357), (01358)

**Movement II, Doxa**

(01356)  [222121]  Z-12 -- Rp and R2 relation
(01346)  [223111]  5-10
(025)    [011010]  3-7 -subset of (02357), (02358), (12457), (01358)

**Movement III, Trisagion I**

Chant Melody:  (02357)  [132130]  5-23

**Movement IV, Mystic Prayer**

Magic Square #1:  (02357)  [132130]  5-23

(2358)  [123121]  5-24
(037)  [001110]  3-11 -subset of (02357), (01357)

Magic Square #2:  (02357)

(1358)  [122230]  5-27
(025)  (subset list above)

**Movement V, Trisagion II**

Chant Melody:  (01357)  [131221]  5-24

**Movement VI, Fos II**

Voices: (0135)

**Movement VII, Epiphania**  (same pc sets as Movement II but in transposition)

(01356)
(01346)
(025)
(The very last episode in Ikon of Light ends with (01356) in the soprano)

Figure 3-21 Pitch Class Set Relationships in *Ikon of Light*
I. Fos

Bass  E/F  F/F  B/F  F#/F  E/F  A/F

sop  g  g

II. Doxa

Drone  G  E  A  F  D

III. Trisagion

(tonal center)  G  G  G

IV. Prayer

C  trio  g  trio  C
drone  CEG  gfede  GBD  gabcd  GFEDC

V. Trisagion

(tonal center)  G  G  G

VI. Fos

bass  G/F  F/F  C/F  G/F  E/F  C/F

VII. Epiphania

drone  G  B  F  A  C

Figure 3-22  Tonal Movement in Ikon of Light
Movements:  I  II  III  IV  V  VI  VII  
Form:       A  B  C  D  C  A  B

I.  *Fos:* In six ‘blocks’: 1-m.1, 2-m.5, 3-m.9, 4-m.13, 5-m.17, 6-m.21

II.  *Doxa:* A (m.1) B (letter B) C (C) B (D) A (E) - palindrome

III. *Trisagion I:* A (m.1) A’ (m.3) A” (m.6)

IV. Mystic Prayer to the Holy Spirit:
   A (letter F, m.3) B (letter N) A’ (S) B’ (W) A” (BB)

V.  *Trisagion II:* A (letter HH) A’ (m.3) A’ (GG)

VI.  *Fos:* In six ‘blocks’ 1-m.1, 2-m.5, 3-m.9, 4-m.13, 5-m.17, 6-m.21

VII. *Epiphania:* A (m.1) B (letter KK) C (LL) B (MM) A (NN) - palindrome

Figure 3-23  Formal Structure in *Ikon of Light*
Figure 3-24  Example of palindrome from Movement VII, *Epiphania*. A combination of the five phrases sung by the soprano voice results in a palindrome.

I. **pp/sff exclamations**  
   high contrast

II. **To be sung as quietly as possible,**  
    no contrast

III. and V. **f**  
    little contrast but alternating forces

IV. **1 – p to f, mp, p,**  
    some contrast, large building

IV. **1 – p to f, mp, p, 2. –mp to ff, 3. – mp to molto f.**  
    some contrast,

VI. **pp/sff,**  
    high contrast

VII.(ff) “shining forth, sonorous”  
    little contrast, climactic effect.

( Overall scheme: Ff –**pp** –f – ff – ff––ff––)

Figure 3-25  Dynamic Contrast in *Ikon of Light*, Movements I-VII.
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Selected compositions by John Tavener and Arvo Pärt and the related literature have been examined. The summary that follows will attempt to illuminate the unique and salient features of *Ikon of Light* and *Te Deum* and to underline the relationship between the philosophies of the two composers and the notes that appear in their scores. *Ikon of Light* and *Te Deum* represent several points of departure from much of 20th-century western music and most of the related literature has turned its focus to these points. However, the literature has not outlined any significant differences between the approaches of the two composers. This discussion will identify both the similarities and differences in the approach and compositions of John Tavener and Arvo Pärt.

An attempt will be made to understand how the spiritual and philosophical influences manifest themselves in the specific musical elements at hand. All conclusions will be based on an examination of the works themselves, and on other primary sources (interviews with the composers and their writings).

Both composers openly and consistently claim that their own religious experience is central and pivotal to their lives as composers. Their composition emerges from an attitude of prayer, meditation, and devotion to God. The resulting music is intended to draw attention away from man, away from the personalities of both composers and performers, and toward the Divine. Indeed, it might not be overstating it to say that, from Pärt and Tavener's point of view, the audience is God. Pärt states, "For Bach, every piece that he wrote was praise of God, but I'm not worthy to say that." (Kostelantetz, 1990, p. 66) and Tavener compares composition with the
act of repentance and “I regard the act of composing as prayer, all work should be prayer.”
(Ratcliffe, 2000, p. 4).

How then does this spiritual life manifest itself in the music? First of all, the convictions and the spiritual lives’ of the composers are revealed in the texts they choose. The texts are overwhelmingly sacred, selected from scripture, from sacred poetry and from the liturgical traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox Church. These texts are set to tempos governed by speech, with simple rhythms punctuated by pauses, engendering an unhurried spirit of reflection. The predominantly homorhythmic declamation of the text ensures clear communication. The frequent presence of the drone creates a sense of timelessness and constancy, both for the ear and for the spirit (the symbolism of the drone is addressed in a previous chapter). There is a quality about the music that lives only in the moment, an apparent absence of concern for what lies ahead. Tension and conflict are momentary, dissonance always returns to consonance; man and God are returned to their rightful place. For Pärt, the interval of the unison, and fifth, and the triad represent the Divine, all that is good, a world in which balance and order are restored (Hillier, 1997, p. 96). Tavener says, “…melody must have a symbolic reason for being there,” and “The ison for me represents the divine presence” (Tavener, 1999, p. 154).

As a result of their immersion in things sacred, John Tavener and Arvo Pärt have spent much of the last two decades composing in the choral medium. The human voice is required to transmit language and liturgy, and Pärt and Tavener have chosen to create vocal/choral compositions in which much of the instrumental writing takes a supportive role. Choral singing is a most ancient tradition in all branches of the Church, and it is possible that Pärt and Tavener choose to use ensembles for symbolic reasons as well- the communal voice of an ensemble contrasted with the individualism of a soloist.
The most touted characteristic of Pärt and Tavener’s approach is their deliberate and constant striving towards simplicity. The simplicity of melody, rhythm, and texture are essential so that the text (in all of its complexity) can be laid clearly before the listener. Pärt would claim that musical complexity can blur the issues and hinder the ‘still, small voice’ of truth. For both Tavener and Pärt, great truths are deceptively simple, faith is essentially a simple act and complexity must be set-aside in order for the ‘inner voice’ to be heard. One factor that contributes greatly to the quality of simplicity is the composers’ deliberate choice of a reduced palette of melodic and rhythmic materials. Tavener’s use of repetition and the ‘always different, yet always the same’ quality of Pärt’s tintinnabuli contribute to the appearance of simplicity.

Another departure from complexity lies in the relentless tonality that pervades both the work of Tavener and Pärt. This tonality is very deliberate and symbolic, supported by the frequent employment of a drone. Tavener’s music is not without dissonance, but his dense, complex and sometimes dissonant sonorities ultimately dissolve into a consonant unison, fifth or triad. It should be noted that Pärt’s very method dictates an unchanging tonal palette while Tavener employs a wider variety of melodic materials that are not always bound to one tonal center for an entire composition.

It might be argued however, that Pärt’s music is not really all that simple. There is an intricate process at work; an examination of the score indicates minute attention to every detail. The materials and the scope may be reduced, but to label the music as “simple” reveals a very superficial understanding of the score. There are subtleties of musical and spiritual expression that emerge only upon repeated exposure to the music of Pärt. Tavener’s music, on the other hand, is at its most effective in large, sweeping gestures, in opulent sonorities, in long phrases which so often relay a sense of spontaneity.
The manipulation of silence as an integral part of the musical score and the preoccupation with symmetry, balance and order also stand out as salient features in the music of both Tavener and Pärt. They seem to be indicating to performers and audience alike the need to breathe; physically, musically and emotionally. This emphasis is a natural outcome of a life directed toward meditation and reflection.

Another commonality found in the music of both Tavener and Pärt lies in the lushness and beauty of sonority that is immediately noted by both the musically initiated and the uninitiated alike. Both composers are highly specific about the timbres and forces required by their scores. They compose for the acoustics of specific spaces (and for specific ensembles), and they actively participate in rehearsals and recordings of their work. While Pärt and Tavener exploit the beauties of the human voice, they are most likely to compose settings for chorus or vocal ensembles. Tintinnabuli, by its definition is a multi-voiced medium and solo parts are rare in Pärt’s work (even in Passio, the role of the Evangelist is sung by a quartet). The vocal demands do not incorporate operatic techniques; professional singers are not needed to execute their works (an exception has been noted in footnote 2, p. 29). Indeed the influence of ‘classic’ European and English choral singing is strong here – singing at its most transparent and leanest, never departing from sonorities of great beauty. It has been noted that many early music groups have premiered and championed the music of Tavener and Pärt, bringing to the music a different vocalism than that used in executing much of the choral music of the 19th and 20th centuries. These recordings may have helped to perpetuate the perception that Tavener and Pärt are neo-medieval composers.

Many of the non-western and medieval influences on the music of Tavener and Pärt are tied to the practices of the church (both Roman and Orthodox). Musical elements already
discussed in this document include the use of the Orthodox drone, and the proliferation of chant-like melodies (for Tavener, they are specifically Byzantine in character).

Two specifically Orthodox influences have influenced both composers. The ikon is a direct inspiration for John Tavener; he describes his music as “aural ikons” and composes in an attempt to represent in aural terms, that which is beyond the human and the natural, just as an ikon depicts a representation of a religious truth or being. Hillier sees the systematic, formulaic process undertaken by the ikon artist as a parallel process to that employed by Pärt. Another Orthodox tradition places great value on prayer and meditation. The term hesychasm is used to describe the specific rituals and traditions involved and these practices resonate throughout the lives and the philosophies of both composers.

Other influences that manifest themselves in Tavener’s music are Sufi and Greek music and poetry, Russian choral chant, English hand bells and Russian and English church bells. Some of these elements involve the use of non-western vocal techniques. While most of Pärt’s work as a composer has been in the closed world of tintinnabuli, in recent years, he has emerged to include other languages and sound possibilities in his more recent compositions (Ross, 2002, p. 116). However, his music still holds fewer eclectic elements when compared to Tavener’s oeuvre.

Tavener and Pärt have chosen to devote most of their focus on works for sacred vocal ensemble, they make extensive use of numeric formulas and systems, and chant plays a large part in their ‘style sound.’ This has resulted in the appellation, “new-medieval.” Perhaps a more subtle but very important link to the ancient is in the ethos of objectivity projected by both composers. The sublimation of the composer and performer’s personality and a disinterest in individual expression stand in contrast to some of the more humanistic trends in western music.
Pärt is especially successful at creating an objective quality to his music, of receding into the shadows while shining the light on the text at hand. These qualities were no doubt influenced by Pärt’s intensive study of early church music and it is no coincidence that his tintinnabuli textures reflect many similarities to early organum (Hillier, 1997, p. 82).

While there are significant similarities in both the philosophy and the compositions of Tavener and Pärt, they are unique individuals who tire quickly of being placed together in the same pigeonhole. There are distinct and fundamental differences in their music, differences that become more pronounced upon closer examination of their scores.

Tavener is a synthesizer of diverse influences, both textually, musically and philosophically. He borrows sonorities and compositional systems (serial, chant, harmonized chant, bell tones) from a number of disparate sources. Take, for example, the ‘Anglican thirds,’ Russian parallel harmonies, Byzantine chant, and eastern microtones and embellishments as mentioned in the review of the literature. Though mentioned only fleetingly in the literature, a great deal of Tavener’s composition is influenced by his own English background. The sonorities and choral traditions of the English church permeate much of his music (as well as his use of organ and handbells) and the continuum of the great English church choral tradition is as present in his ear as are the chants of Orthodoxy. Tavener’s music is characterized by significant diversity. Both linear and vertical textures abound in his large compositions, always carefully delineated by contrasting blocks of sound.

Perhaps one reason for the difference between these two men lies in the fact that Pärt employs one unifying system that results in one readily identifiable sound. Pärt has a unique method of crafting the melodic/harmonic and rhythmic material and this creates a very distinctive texture and aural quality. His music cannot be mistaken for that of anyone else.
Pärt's music is consistently minimalistic in its use of reduced materials, and he has maintained a remarkable consistency of style despite the natural evolution found in any composer's creative journey. And while Pärt pulls away from so much that is modern and secular, much of his compositional approach is indeed very Western in the organized, rational way in which he uses serialism in his tintinnabuli approach.

Tavener's music does not have the unifying factor of one compositional system but he uses far more literal repetition (often described as ritualistic) than Pärt, who uses almost none. Tavener's music appears to be more concerned with effect. It is dramatic while Pärt's compositions are deliberately non-narrative. Tavener has composed operas and other narrative stories (*Fall and Resurrection*) and the scope of his music is large and comprehensive in sound, forces, range, and dynamics. The raw possibilities of sonority seem to motivate his thinking and extremes of range and dynamics occur frequently in Tavener's music, in contrast to the more restrained and reflective approach of Arvo Pärt.

In conclusion, a final question must be asked, "Does this music provide evidence of solid, valid craftsmanship? Does the music stand alone when it is stripped of the program notes, the texts and the extra-musical, religious context?"

If this same question were posed to the two composers in this study, they would emphatically agree that this is the wrong question to ask. The question has little relevance to their frame of reference; no more than it would to a medieval musician, or to the painter of an ikon. Indeed, some of Pärt's and Tavener's music has been created specifically for liturgical use, not as fodder for the world of music criticism. Tavener is dismissive of the critics; he comes to the music from a specific spiritual frame of reference and if the listener shares no commonality with that frame of reference then he claims that it is the listener's loss. Tavener makes no
apology for the many extra-musical references in his scores. Pärt would either shrug the question off as immaterial, or he would shove the score toward the critic. He is convinced that the music is as close to ‘truth’ as he can come. That is all that matters.  

For the purposes of this document, the question is not irrelevant. The music of Pärt and Tavener is valid, worthy of analysis and compelling in performance. This is music that has been composed in a careful and systematic way; great attention has been paid to text setting, to melody, to form and to sonority as an expressive element.

It is important to remember first that both composers underwent extensive, formal training in western music composition; Pärt and Tavener have spent their entire careers crafting music in a variety of idioms, and they have each exploited a number of compositional techniques. Over several decades their work has evolved into the approach that we see today. Those who claim that Pärt’s music is vacuous and empty have not looked carefully at his compositions. Under the surface simplicity of tintinnabuli lies an intricate and delicate tapestry that is not only determined by numbers and formulas, but is subtly adjusted by the composer to create horizontal and vertical lines that balance in weight, length, texture, sonority and form. Pärt’s compositions are highly unified and carry with them a depth of meaning that few listeners would deny. (No composer finds success in simply applying a rigid formula of pitches and durations, any more than a great artist can simply ‘paint by numbers.’) Pärt might argue that it is a tremendous challenge to find meaning and order in the combination of just a few notes; indeed he implies that it might be far easier to compose the ‘complex’ music to which the musical community is more accustomed. He uses his formulae, not from a lack of creativity, but in order

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1 Nora Pärt despairs of all of the interest in the extra-musical elements surrounding her husband’s work. She would point the critic directly to the score and begin the discussion there. Nora Pärt is a frequent contributor to interviews and discussions involving her husband, often interpreting or paraphrasing his views for those seeking insight into his work. (Smith, 1999, p. 21)
to concentrate and control his creative impulses, to distill meaning into as simple and compact a medium as possible.

John Tavener also employs systems. While more eclectic than Pärt in his approach, he still uses a limited number of pitch combinations and patterns and, with careful attention to process and structure, he has composed a large and cohesive structure of considerable variety and color, rendering a significant impact. While much of his melodic writing sounds spontaneous and improvised, it has been shown that, like the chant melodies in Mvt.IV in *Ikon of Light*, great care has been taken to devise melodic material in a systematic, rational manner. Tavener’s comments and writings about spirituality and music may have obscured the fact that he takes the compositional process and the requirements of his craft very seriously.

If the music discussed in this document were obscure and little known than the questions raised here might constitute an academic exercise. However, the compositions of Pärt and Tavener have found devoted followers, not only in the musical community but also among thousands of concertgoers and audiophiles on several continents. Their music has an appeal to the larger public; those outside of the ‘musical elite’ find in it substance and meaning. While popularity alone may not be a lasting measure of musical worth, neither is it a reason to negate or dismiss a body of music.

Perhaps the very spirituality, the simplicity and tonality found in the music of Tavener and Pärt provide the listener with an accessible starting point from which to enter into a reflection on the texts at hand. This music is largely devoid of angst, of conflict or tension; it engenders a spirit of humility and often, of repentance. While Pärt’s music is sometimes described as sad (he is a very serious, thoughtful man who has lived on both sides of the Iron Curtain), this author finds in Pärt’s acknowledgement of suffering and evil, an ultimate message
of redemption and hope. Peace and ‘spirituality’ are not forced upon the listener, indeed, he may leave in utter boredom, or he may allow the text and music to resonate, finding a meeting point with his own spirit.

While John Tavener and Arvo Pärt may navigate less traveled tributaries at the beginning of the 21st century, they are not the first composers to wrestle with the artistic implications of man’s response to his Creator. Indeed, this struggle has been going on for centuries. There is no doubt that Tavener and Pärt’s thoughts would resonate with the words of another great composer who forged his own path at the beginning of another new century:

The Church knew what the psalmist knew; music praises God. Music is as well or better able to praise Him than the building of the church and all its decoration; it is the Church’s greatest ornament. Glory, glory, glory: the music of Orlando Lasso’s motet praises God, and this particular “glory” does not exist in secular music… I say simply that, without the Church, “left to our own devices,” we are poorer by many musical forms.

Igor Stravinsky (Van Den Toorn, 1983, p. 414)
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Arvo Pärt

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APPENDIX A

TRANSLATIONS

Arvo Pärt, *Te Deum*

I
Te Deum laudamus, te Dominum confitemur

*We praise Thee O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord*

II
Te aeternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur

*All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting*

III
Tibi omnes Angeli, tibicaeli, et universae Potestates
Tibi Cherubim et Seraphim incessabili voce proclamanet
Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth

*To Thee all angels cry aloud, the heavens, and all the powers therein*
*To Thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry*
*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.*

IV
Pleni sunt caeli et terra majestatis gloriae tuae

*Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory.*

V
Te gloriosus apostolorum chorus
Te Prophetarum laudabilis numerus
Te Martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus

*The glorious company of the apostles praise Thee*
*The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise Thee*
*The noble army of martyrs praise Thee.*

VI
Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur Ecclesia
Patrem immense majestatis
Venerandum tuum verum et unicum Filium
Sanctum quoque Paraclitum Spiritum
The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee
The Father, of an infinite majesty
Thine honorable, true, and only Son:
Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter

VII
Tu rex gloriae, Christe
Tu Patris sempiternus es Filius
Tu ad liberandum susceputur hominem non horruisti Virginis uterum

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father
When Thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the womb of a Virgin.

VIII
Tu, devicto mortis aculeo, aperuisti credentibus regna caelorum

When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

IX
Tu ad dexteram Dei sedes, in gloria Patris
Judex crederis esse venturus

Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father.
We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge.

X
Te ergo quaesumus, tuis famulis subveni quos pretioso sanguine redemisti

We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.

XI
Aeterna fac cum Sanctis tuis in gloria numerari

Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints in glory everlasting.

XII
Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic hereditati tuae
Et rege eos, et extolle illos usque in aeternum.

O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine heritage.
Govern them, and lift them up forever.
XIII
Per singulos dies benedicimus te.
Et laudamus nomen tuum in saeculum, et in saeculum saeculi.

Day by day we magnify Thee.
And we worship Thy name ever, world without end.

XIV
Dignare, Domine, dieisto sine peccato nos custodire.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.

XV
Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.
Fiat miserivordia tua, Domine
Supernos, quemadmodum speravimus in te.

O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
Let Thy mercy be upon us, as our trust is in Thee.

XVI
In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum.

In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted: let me never be confounded.

XVII
Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus (x6)

Holy, holy, holy.
John Tavener, *Ikon of Light*

(Translation from the Greek by Dr. Elizabeth Briere: Cover of vocal score, *Ikon of Light*. Chester Music, 1983, and in liner notes for *Ikon of Light*, recorded by The Tallis Scholars, Gimell, 1991)

I. Light.

II. Glory.

III. *Trisagion*: Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy upon us.

IV. *Invocation to the Holy Spirit*:

Come, true light, Come, life eternal.
Come, hidden mystery.
Come, treasure without name.
Come, reality beyond all words.
Come, person beyond all understanding.
Come, rejoicing without end.
Come, light that knows no evening.
Come, unfailing expectation of the saved.
Come, the raising of the fallen.
Come, the resurrection of the dead.
Come, all-powerful, for unceasingly you create, refashion and change all things by your will alone.
Come, invisible, whom none may touch and handle.
Come, for you continue always unmoved, yet at every instant you are wholly in movement; you draw near to us who lie in hell, yet you remain higher than the heavens.
Come, for your Name fills our hearts with longing and is ever on our lips; yet who you are and what your nature is, we cannot say or know.
Come, eternal joy.

Come, unfading garland.
Come, purple vesture of our great God and King.
Come, belt of crystal set with precious stones.
Come, sandal that none dares to touch.
Come, royal robe and right hand of true sovereignty.

Come, for my wretched soul has ever longed and ever longs for you.
Come, alone to the alone, for as you see I am alone.
Come, you who have separated me from all things and made me to be alone upon the earth.
Come, for you are yourself the desire that is within me, and you have caused me to long after you, the wholly inaccessible.

Come, my breath and my life.
Come, the consolation of my humble soul.
Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.


V. *Trisagion:* Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy upon us.

VI. Light.

VII. Shining forth.
APPENDIX B
BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

Arvo Part was born in 1935, John Tavener in 1944, and although their considerable musical gifts were both recognized and encouraged at an early age, the two men grew up in opposite worlds.

Arvo Part was raised in the Soviet state of Estonia, and, after an early career as a Soviet composer committed to modernist techniques, he withdrew from composition in 1968. During a silence of seven years Pärt studied early music and emerged in the early 1970’s with a new compositional approach which had much in common with minimalism: a general reduction of materials, a return to tonality, use of repetitive schemes and a feeling of stasis. This unique contribution of Part’s is known as the tintinnabuli style, a technique in which voices perform constant permutations of a triad and a scale, resulting in a sonority reminiscent of church bells. It was during this time that Pärt joined the Russian Orthodox Church. Pärt and his wife moved to Berlin in 1981, where he continues to live today. He has worked extensively with Estonian, English and German ensembles in performances and recordings of his works. The majority of Part’s output in the last decade consist of sacred works on Latin texts for vocal ensembles; both a capella and with the instrumental accompaniment.

John Tavener, raised in England by well-to-do parents and provided with a good education, was something of a “boy wonder” in English contemporary music circles. After several years of composing using highly eclectic methods, Tavener changed directions both musically and spiritually upon uniting with the Orthodox Church. A great deal of time spent in Greece brought together Tavener’s interest in both the Byzantine and Russian traditions of Orthodoxy. Tavener’s output has been almost exclusively sacred and vocal (often a capella) for the past two decades. Links can be found in his music to Byzantine chant, to Russian harmonies and drones and to other Eastern musical traditions. Not content to only compose, Tavener has lectured and written at length on the nature of the sacred in art and music.
APPENDIX C

LIST OF CHORAL WORKS

Arvo Pärt

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An den Wassern zu Babel sassen wir und weinten, Psalm 137
(1976), 4 voices and instrumental ensemble.
(1991), arr. for SATB choir and organ by C. Bowers-Broadbent

And one of the Pharisees…(1990), 3 male voices or choir (Ct[A]/TB).

The Beatitudes (1990/1991), SATB choir or soloists and organ.

Beatus Petronius (1990), 8 part SATB choir and 2 organs.


Bogoroditse Dyevo (Mother of God and Virgin) (1990), SATB choir.

Cannon of Repentence, see "Kanon pokajanen"

Cantate Domino Canticum Novum, Psalm 95 (1977/1996), SATB choir or
soloists and organ.

Cantiques des degrés (1999), SATB choir and orchestra.

Cecilia, vergine romana (2000), choir and orchestra.

Credo (1968), Mixed choir, piano and orchestra.

De Profundis Clamavi, Psalm 129 (1977/1980), Male choir or soloists, organ and
ad libitum percussion.

Dopo la vittoria (1997), SATB choir.

I Am The True Vine(1996), SATB choir.

In Spe, see "An den Wassern zu Babel..."

Litany (Prayers of St. John Chrysostom for each hour of the day and night) (1994) ATTB soli, choir and chamber orchestra.

Littlemore Tractus (2001), SATB choir

Magnificat (1989), SATB choir.


Meie aed, op.3 (Our Garden) (1959), Children's choir and orchestra


Miserere (1989/92), SATB soli, SATB choir and ensemble.


Nunc dimittis (2001), SATB choir.

Nun eile ich zu euch (Nýnje k wam pribjegáju) see "Kanon Pokajanen"

Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem (St. John Passion) (1982), Vocal ensemble, choir and instrumental ensemble.

Sieben Magnificat Antiphonen see "Magnificat Antiphonen"


Stabat Mater (1985), 3 voices (SAT) and string trio.

Statuit ei Dominus (1990), Two SATB choirs and 2 organs.


Te Deum (1984-92), choir, string orchestra, piano and tape.

Tribute to Caesar (1997), SATB choir.

Triodion (1998), SATB choir.

Ein Wallfahrtslied, Psalm 121
1984, rev. 1996) Male voice (tenor or baritone) and string quartet. (2001), Male voice choir and string orchestra.

...which was the son of... (2000), SATB choir.

The Woman with The Alabaster Box (1997), SATB choir.


John Tavener

(Source: Chester/Novello Music Publishers)

CHORUS PLUS ENSEMBLE/ORCHESTRA

A New Beginning (1999) - 7 mins.
Soloist(s): solo tenor or soprano; Chorus: SATB + children's chorus
Orchestration: 3tpt.3tbn/3[2]perc.timp/org/str[str4tet]

Celtic Requiem (1969) - 23 mins.
Soloist(s): Soprano, Contralto, Bass; Chorus: Children's Chorus, SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 0010/01(ptpt)10/aeolian bagpipes.pf.org/7perc.timp/egtr(bgtr)/str

Credo (1960) - 11 mins.
Soloist(s): Tenor; Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 3ob/3tpt.2tbn/org

Soloist(s): large Tibetan Temple bowl, organ; Chorus: SSAATTBB, boys choir
Orchestration: str(6.5.4.4.3)

Soloist(s): 2 Sopranos, 2 Tenors, Bass; Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: perc:handbells.tub bell/lg gong/lg tamtam/[org]

Funeral Canticle (1996) - 23 mins.
Soloist(s): Tenor or Baritone; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: [str]

Genesis (1962) - 18 mins.
Soloist(s): Tenor, Narrator; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: 2hn.3tpt.3tbn/timp/pf.org/str4tet

Soloist(s): Bass; Chorus: 5S.2A Chorus
Orchestration: 6vn

Chorus: SSSSAATTBar2BB Chorus
Orchestration: vn.va.vc

Ikon of St Seraphim (1988) - 30 mins.
Soloist(s): 2 Violins, Countertenor, 4 Basses; Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 2tpt.2tbn+2btbn/tam/str
**Ikon of the Crucifixion** (1988) - 11 mins.
Soloist(s): Soprano, Countertenor, Baritone, Bass; Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 3tpt.4tbn/timp.perc/org/str

**In Memory** (2001) - 9 mins.
Soloist(s): Bass; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: string orch

**In One Single Moment** (2000) - 10 mins.
Chorus: Male chorus (tenors & basses)
Orchestration: tibetan temple bowl/str4tet

**Introit for March** 27, the Feast of St John of Damascene (1968) - 20 mins.
Soloist(s): Soprano, Alto; Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 2hn.2tpt/pf.org/str

**Kyklike Kinesis** (1977) - 45 mins.
Soloist(s): Cello, Soprano; Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 0101(cbn)/1110/timp.perc/pf/str4t+db

Soloist(s): Soprano, counter-tenor; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: 2.1.0.0/4.3.3.0./hp/tbells.3 temple bowls.str

**Lamentations and Praises** (2000) - 70 mins.
Chorus: 4Ct.4T.2Bar.2B
Orchestration: fl/btn/timp/perc(Byz. monastery bell/v lrg Tibetan tmpl bl,v lrg tamtam,tub,símantron)/str (11111)

**Let's Begin Again** (1995) - 60 mins.
Chorus: SATB Chorus (18 Voices)
Orchestration: 4rec.ob.cl/tpt.tbn.tba/perc/hp.pf[org]/str4t

**Little Requiem for Father Malachy Lynch** (1972) - 13 mins.
Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 2fl/tpt/org/str

**Ma fin est mon commencement** (1972) - 4 mins.
Chorus: 4-Part Tenor Chorus
Orchestration: 4tbn/perc/4vc

**Many Years** (1987) - 5 mins.
Soloist(s): Baritone; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: [str]
Many Years (for the 50th birthday of HRH The Prince of Wales) (1998) - 4 mins.
Soloist(s): Soprano
Orchestration: string quartet
(Alt.: version for SATB chorus plus optional strings also available)

Nomine Jesu (1970) - 8 mins.
Soloist(s): Mezzo-soprano; Chorus: 2 groups of 7 singers (SSATTBB)
Orchestration: 2af1/org (2 players)/5 male speaking voices

Requiem for Father Malachy (1973) - 38 mins.
Soloist(s): 2 Countertenors, Tenor, 2 Baritones, Bass; Chorus: 6pt mixed chorus
Orchestration: 2(2pic)000/0110/2perc(timp)/pf.ch org/str4tet

Soloist(s): Soprano, Countertenor, Bass, Actors; Chorus: SATB & male chorus
Orchestration: recs.2afl/3tpt.5tbn/timp.perc.tam/org/str4tet

Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 2hn.2tpt.2tbn/timp.3perc/pf[org]/str

Song of the Cosmos (2000)
Soloist(s): Soprano, Baritone; Chorus: SSAATTBB
Orchestration: Grp 1: lrg Tibetan tmpl bwl/v lrg tamtam/bandir drum/str5tet, Grp
4tpt/med Tibetan tmpl Bwl/v lrg tamtam / timp, Grp 3: 5 tbn/str, Grp 4: solo tomtoms/lrg
Tibetan tmpl bwl/v lrg tamtam/str/org

Soloist(s): Treble, Soprano, Contralto, 7 Countertenors, Tenor, Bass; Chorus: Boys’ &
Male Voices
Orchestration:5rec.sx/10tpt.4tbn+2cbtbn/2timp.gongs.tam.bells/org/str4tet.16vn.
8db arranged in 3 spatial groups

Soloist(s): 4 female voices; Chorus: SSMSAT
Orchestration: str4tet

Soloist(s): Viola; Chorus: Chorus
Orchestration: 1perc
The Veil of the Temple (2002) - 480 mins.
Soloist(s): Soprano; Chorus: SATB / boys chorus
Orchestration: duduk/3hn.2tp.2bn+tb/tib/Tibetan horn/org/synth/timp.3 temple bowls
(high,medium,low)/tam-tam/set of tubular bells/set of handbells/sinmantron/Indian
harmonium/8.8.4.4.3 str

The Whale (1966) - 32 mins.
Soloist(s): Mezzo-soprano, Bass, Speaker; Chorus: children's chorus, SATB chorus
Orchestration: 2(pic.afl)22(bcl)2(cbn)/4331/timp.8perc(cel)/hp.amp pf.grand
org.Horg/str(no vn)/tp

Ultimos Ritos (1972) - 50 mins.
Soloist(s): Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass; Chorus: 5 SATB Choruses (2.2.2.2 each)
Orchestration: 4(2afl)+6rec.4(2obda)00/4.10.4.0/timp.perc/amp ch org.amp hpd.g
org/str(6.6.4.4.2)

We Shall See Him as He Is (1992) - 60 mins.
Soloist(s): Soprano, 2 Tenors; Chorus: SATB Chorus
Orchestration: 2tpt/2timp/org/str(min 10 ve)

CHORUS – A CAPELLA (including works accompanied by one instrument)

Acclamation (1987) - 3 mins., Chorus: SSATTBB

A Christmas Round (1990), Chorus: SATB

All Ye that in Christ have been baptised (1998) - 5 mins., Chorus: SATB/TBB

Amen (1994) - 4 mins., Chorus: SATB

A Nativity Carol (1988) - 2 mins., Chorus: SSSAA

Angels (1985) - 12 mins., Chorus: SSATTTBBBB, Orchestration: org

Annunciation (1992) - 5 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass;
Chorus:3S3A4T5B

Antiphon for Christmas Morning (1972) - 5 mins., Chorus: SSSS

Apolytikion of Our Holy St. Nicholas (1988) - 3 mins., Chorus: SATB

Apolytikion of St. Martin (1997) - 12 mins.
Soloist(s): Psaltis or solo tenor or bass; Chorus: SSAATTTBBBB

Apolytikion of the Incarnation (1998) - 10 mins., Chorus: SSATB/SATBB
As One Who Has Slept (1996) - 5 mins., Chorus: SATB

A Village Wedding (1992) - 11 mins., Soloist(s): Countertenor, 2 Tenors, Bass

Awed by the Beauty (2001) - 10 mins., Chorus: TB

Be Ye Wise (2001) - 3 mins., Soloist(s): SATB

Bethel (1998) - 5 mins., Chorus: SATB, Orchestration: org

Birthday Sleep (1999) - 5 mins., Chorus: 2S3A3T4B

Butterfly Dreams (2002) - 20 mins., Chorus: SSSAAAATTTBBB

Canticle of the Mother of God (1976) - 13 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano; Chorus: SSATBB

Come and do Your will in me (1997) - 10 mins., Chorus: SSSAAAATTTTBBB

Coplas (1970) - 11 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass;
Chorus: SATB (16 voices), Orchestration: tp

Doxa (1982) - 5 mins., Chorus: SSAATTB - 2 antiphonal choirs

Eonia (1989) - 4 mins., Chorus: SSAATBB

Exhortation and Kohima (2003) - 3 mins., Chorus: Two SATB choirs (1 from a distance)

Fear and Rejoice, O People (1997) - 8 mins., Chorus: SSSSSAAATTTTB BBB

Funeral Canticle (1996) - 23 mins., Soloist(s): Tenor or Baritone; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: [str]

Funeral Ikos (1981) - 12 mins., Chorus: SSATBB

Glory to God for this Transient Life (2000) - 4 mins., Chorus: Youth Choir (SA)
Orchestration: handbells & gong

God Is With Us (1987) - 5 mins., Soloist(s): Tenor or Baritone; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: org

He Hath Entered the Heaven (1982) - 8 mins., Soloist(s): 9 trebles
Orchestration: [handbells]

Hymn of the Unwaning Light (1996) - 15 mins., Soloist(s): Baritone or Tenor;
Chorus: SSAATTBBB
Hymn to the Holy Spirit (1987) - 12 mins., Soloist(s): 3 trebles; Chorus: SSAATTBB

Ikon of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (1986) - 12 mins., Chorus: SATTBB

Ikon of St. Hilda (1998) - 6 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano; Chorus: SA

Ikon of the Nativity (1991) - 12 mins., Chorus: 4S2A2T3B

Ikon of the Trinity (1990) - 5 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano, Bass; Chorus: SSAABB

In the Month of Athyr (1998) - 7 mins., Soloist(s): Narrator; Chorus: SATB

Innocence (1994) - 30 mins., Soloist(s): Cello, Organ, Soprano, Tenor; Chorus: SATB
Orchestration: handbells

Lament of the Mother of God (1989) - 10 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano; Chorus: 4S3A2T3B

Let Not the Prince be Silent (1988) - 25 mins., Chorus: SSAATTBB - 2 antiphonal choirs

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (1977) - 60 mins., Chorus: SSAAATTTBBBB

Love Bade Me Welcome (1985) - 4 mins., Soloist(s): Piano; Chorus: SAATBB

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (1986) - 12 mins., Chorus: SSSAAATTBB

Many Years (1987) - 5 mins., Soloist(s): Baritone; Chorus: SATB, Orchestration: [str]

Mother and Child (2002) - 10 mins., Chorus: SSAATTBB
Orchestration: Org/Large Hindu Temple Gong

Notre Père (1996) - 4 mins., Chorus: children's choir

O Thou Gentle Light (2000) - 5 mins., Soloist(s): Tenor Psaltist;
Chorus: unaccompanied chorus

O, Do Not Move (1990) - 3 mins., Chorus: SsSATBB

Orthodox Vigil Service (1984) - 120 mins., Chorus: SATB, Orchestration: handbells

Panikhida (1986) - 25 mins., Chorus: SATB

Parting Gift for Tam Farrow (2000) - 2 mins., Chorus: SATB

Prayer for the Healing of the Sick (1999) - 5 mins., Chorus: SATB

Prayer for the World (1981) - 30 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass (4.4.4.4)
Prayer to the Holy Trinity (1995) - 5 mins., Chorus: SATB

Psalm 121: I Will Lift up Mine Eyes unto the Hills (1989) - 5 mins., Chorus: SSAATBBB

Ravonee (1998) - 4 mins., Chorus: SATB

Responsorium in Memoriam Annon Lee Silver (1971) - 7 mins.
   Soloist(s): 2 Mezzo-sopranos; Chorus: SATB, Orchestration: 2fl (ad lib)

Song for Athene (1993) - 7 mins., Chorus: SATB

Svyati (1995) - 20 mins., Soloist(s): Cello; Chorus: SSSAATTTBBB

The Bridal Chamber - 10 mins., Soloist(s): 2 Countertenors, 3 Tenors, 2 Basses

The Call (1988) - 10 mins., Chorus: SSSSSAAATTTBB

The Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete (1981) - 15 mins., Chorus: SSSATBB

The Lamb (1982) - 4 mins., Chorus: SATB

The Last Discourse (1997) - 22 mins.
   Soloist(s): Double Bass (amplified), Soprano, Bass; Chorus: SATB

The Lord's Prayer (1982) - 2 mins., Chorus: SATB

The Lord's Prayer (1993) - 10 mins., Chorus: SATB

The Lord's Prayer (1999) - 4 mins., Chorus: SATB

The Mother of God (1999) - 5 mins., Chorus: SATB

Theoteke - 3 mins., Chorus: SSAA

The Same Yesterday, Today and Forever (1999), Chorus: SATB
   Orchestration: Tibetan Temple Bowls

The Second Coming (2001) - 10 mins., Soloist(s): Organ; Chorus: SATB

The Tyger (1987) - 10 mins., Chorus: S2S2A3T4B

The Uncreated Eros (1988) - 8 mins., Chorus: SSSSAATBBB

The World is Burning (1993) - 20 mins., Chorus: 10S.6A.6T.6B (solo voices from choir)
   Orchestration: tamtam
Three Antiphons (1995) - 7 mins., Chorus: 2S2A2T4B

Thunder Entered Her (1990) - 20 mins., Chorus: SATB / male chorus
   Orchestration: org/handbells

Today the Virgin (1989), Chorus: SAT2B

Tribute to Cavafy (1999) - 40 mins., Soloist(s): Soprano; Chorus: SATB
   Orchestration: narrator and percussion

Two Hymns to the Mother of God (1985) - 7 mins., Chorus: SATB

Wedding Greeting (1989) - 3 mins., Soloist(s): Tenor; Chorus: SATB

Wedding Prayer (1987) - 5 mins., Chorus: SSAATTBB

Wedding Prayer (1994) - 2 mins., Chorus: SATB

When in Jordan (2001) - 10 mins.. Chorus: SATB