

HEBRIDES ENSEMBLE

DUNEDIN CONSORT

Arvo Pärt

Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem

Conductor William Conway

Christus Matthew Brook

Pilatus Hugo Hymas

Evangelist Quartet

Rachel Ambrose-Evans – soprano

Jessica Gillingwater – alto

David Lee – tenor

Jon Stainsby – bass

Chorus

Soprano

Christine Buras

Sally Carr

Rachel Thomas

Alto

David Lewis

Jessica Conway

Hannah Leggatt

Tenor

Alasdair Bisset

Max Carsley

Robert Woodford

Bass

Tim Edmundson

James Kennedy

Jonathan Kennedy

Hebrides Ensemble

Oboe

Ruth Contractor

Violin

Zoë Beyers

Bassoon

Ursula Leveaux

Cello

Christian Elliott

Organ

David Gerrard

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Video Production

Arms & Legs

Directed by

Ross Addy and Tommy Slack

Motion Graphics & Titles

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Lighting Design

Jamie Heseltine

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Programme Note

Arvo Pärt was born in 1935, during the short-lived first Estonian Republic. Just five years later, the Soviet Union effectively annexed the Baltic country, with the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Pärt studied at the specialist music secondary school in Tallinn and subsequently at the city's conservatory, with the celebrated Estonian composer Veljjs Tormis. After completing his military service, Pärt worked as a sound engineer and composer for films, theatre and children's TV programmes (his soundtracks for these are worth looking up on YouTube!). Indeed, before developing and devoting himself to the so-called *tintinnabuli* technique – the compositional approach he is best known for today – Pärt explored the broadest possible range of different styles, traversing virtually the entire gamut of aesthetic trends of the time. In the earlier years of his career, Pärt composed works that variously employ folk influences, strict serialism, experimental counterpoint (heavily under the influence of J.S. Bach) and a kind of collage-based style. But around 1976, Pärt began experimenting with an approach to composition that he termed *tintinnabulation*. The system is essentially based on the ringing of bells, with which the composer found himself increasingly captivated. In an interview, he described the resonances of the technique and what it meant to him at the time in aesthetic terms:

Tintinnabulation is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers – in my life, my music, my work. In my dark hours, I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning. The complex and many-faceted only confuses me, and I must search for unity. What is it, this one thing, and how do I find my way to it? Traces of this perfect thing appear in many guises – and everything that is unimportant falls away.

On a practical level, Pärt's tintinnabulation is a deceptively simple technique. He takes two musical lines at a time: one (the melody voice) playing or singing a scale with the notes rising or falling by a single step at a time, while the other (the so-called tintinnabuli voice) leaps around it with an accompanying broken chord. The two voices are always ordered to present an alternation between consonance and dissonance. This relationship often manifests itself in unusual and striking ways, leading to a completely fresh-sounding, luminous harmonic language. At times, it seems to completely invert the very concepts of consonance and dissonance. The purest (and perhaps most profound) example of Pärt's tintinnabuli can probably be heard in the short but crystalline solo piano piece *Für Alina* (it's worth watching [this video](#), which shows the score and beautifully illustrates how the practice works in

real-time). But Pärt went on to work with this technique in progressively larger-scale works, employing it at multiple levels simultaneously between several instruments and/or voices.

On the one hand, Pärt's post-1970s music owes little to the Estonian tradition. It is a fusion of the Western classical tradition's disparate elements, with the unmistakable influence of the Russian Orthodox church's musical soundworld and its liturgical chant and bells. However, on the other hand, such music could never really have come from anywhere else. At various times in its history, Estonia has been under the rule of the Danish, Swedish, Germans and Russians. The majority religion is, in fact, Lutheranism (the church in which Pärt was brought up, rather than the Orthodox church to which he only turned later in life). After the Soviet annexation, the new regime worked hard to reduce the previously vibrant Estonian cultural communities' influence, which it always regarded as potentially subversive. Estonia's creative community of writers, composers and artists therefore had a particularly complex relationship with the latest twentieth-century modernist developments, maintaining links to both the USSR and the West. Pärt's later music (i.e. post-1976) brings these elements and cultural conditions together in equal measure, creating something wholly different – a genuinely unique soundworld.

Passio was completed in 1982, not long after *Für Alina*. But it took tintinnabulation to a different level. *Passio* isn't really easy listening. It's attracted criticism and been held up as an example by Pärt's critics as a work entirely based on a formulaic approach, devoid of creative imagination. It is certainly a different thing altogether from J.S. Bach's Passion settings, which, to most listeners, are probably the paradigm (although we know that Passions were sung since at least the thirteenth century). Whereas Bach's Passions borrowed their musical language directly from the opera house, in *Passio* Pärt strips away all the rhetoric and depersonalises the characters.

Pärt employs a quartet of four singers (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) to deliver the Evangelist's narrative. They are often accompanied (but just as often not) by a quartet of violin, oboe, cello and bassoon. The only two individuated voices in *Passio* are those of Christus (bass) and Pilatus (tenor), who always sing alone accompanied by the organ. And while Pärt does employ a chorus to sing the so-called *turba* or crowd choruses, these are short outbursts rather than the large-scale dramatic tableaux of Bach's Matthew Passion, which you might have heard us perform recently.

Pärt sets John's Gospel in the Latin Vulgate translation. The church fathers traditionally believed John the Evangelist was the only one of the Apostles actually to witness Christ on the cross. In comparison with the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), John's account is terse, and Pärt's pared-back musical language matches this accordingly. *Passio* reflects John's matter-of-fact style in numerous ways, but most obviously in its simple three-part structure. The piece opens with a choral 'exordium' and closes with an exquisite prayer, exactly as laid out in John 18. Between these short, self-contained sections comes the main narrative, introduced *a cappella* by the baritone of the Evangelist quartet.

Pärt identifies the different musical groups in sharp contrast using a series of tonal and rhythmical tropes. Pärt's music is often described as being 'modal' – i.e. using the tools of the medieval world, before flats and sharps became part of the harmonic language. But this is only partly true. What Pärt actually does is allude to *both* the modal and tonal systems simultaneously and play off the resulting tensions between the two. This has a powerful effect, as past, present and future are heard to collide. While the Evangelist and instrumental quartets (and Jesus) are confined to the plangent Aeolian/Hypodorian mode, the chorus interjects with E-major chords, as if coming from a different world. The respective singers' vocal registers never change, even as the organ accompaniment does, going from playing a supporting role to being inverted and floating ethereally above (particularly in the case of Christ).

Rhythmically, Pärt uses a codified formal structure based on the syllable lengths and punctuation marks that end each clause or sentence. Commas, periods and colons are set to progressively slower note values. In turn, these cadences are punctuated by extended silences, a trademark of Pärt's tintinnabuli style. It is as if he provides time for the bell sounds to completely dissipate before he feels ready to introduce the next musical phrase. The other thing to note in rhythmic terms is how both the crowd chorus and Pilate always begin with a syncopated figure – like they are somehow at odds with the other groups' musical perfections. Pilate's part is the most random (in a very literal way!) of the whole piece. His line joins together a series of strange angular melodic leaps and the consistent implication of the tritone between B and F (something that was forbidden in medieval music, and known as the *diabolus in musica*). This perhaps offers some insight into Pärt's reading of Pilate the politician's internal psyche. But don't worry if you're not a music theorist: you'll hear it as well as you'd see it on the score.

While all this might seem a bit contrived when described in prose, in performance Pärt's carefully constructed formal devices help define a natural dramatic pacing, faithfully preserving the syntax of the text. And whereas Bach's Passion settings actively seek to persuade the listener with missionary zeal, *Passio* makes no such attempt. Instead, it offers a more objective presentation of the narrative, inviting the listener to meditate on all the implications and ambiguities of the text from a 20th-century perspective, whether they may be a believer or not.

David Lee

Artist Biographies

William Conway

William Conway is an internationally renowned conductor and cellist, whose performances have been described as 'astonishingly convincing' (Opera magazine), 'a tour de force' (Guardian), with 'a flair for the unpredictable' (Financial Times). On the podium, he is known for his conviction, clarity and intelligent musicianship, while his collaborations with Hebrides Ensemble, of whom he is the Artistic Director and founding member, have been praised for their fresh and inspirational approach to programming.

As a conductor, he studied in Helsinki with Jukka-Pekka Saraste and was a finalist and prizewinner in the 1994 Leeds Conductors' Competition. Since then, he has established himself as a conductor of versatility in chamber, symphonic and operatic repertoire, and has conducted the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, English Sinfonia, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, and the Symphony Orchestras of Cairo, Sofia, Zagreb, de Filharmonie of Flanders, the Belgian orchestra Beethoven Academie, Teatro di Cagliari, Göttingen, Aalborg Sinfonie Orchester and the American Phoenix Symphony Orchestra in all repertoires from baroque to present day.

He made his conducting debut at the 2018 BBC Proms in performances of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*. He has conducted many operas including Mozart's *Magic Flute* and *Figaro*, Verdi's *Otello*, Puccini's *Tosca* and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, the double-bill *Cav/Pag*, Puccini's *Gianni Schicci* to Nigel Osborne's *Differences in Demolition* and Sir Peter Maxwell-Davies's *Martyrdom of St Magnus*. He is a regular guest with many young orchestras including the National Youth orchestras of Scotland and Australia. He teaches conducting at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

He is Music Director of Edinburgh Studio Opera and is Artistic Director and Head of Strings at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh. He broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, Linn Records, Unicorn-Kanchana and Delphian Records in a series of highly successful recordings of music by Judith Weir and Nigel Osborne. His recordings with Hebrides Ensemble of music by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Sir James MacMillan have both reached no 3 and no 1 respectively in the classical music charts.

Matthew Brook

Matthew Brook has appeared widely as a soloist, and has worked extensively with conductors such as Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Richard Hickox, Sir Charles Mackerras, Harry Christophers, Christophe Rousset, Paul McCreesh and Sir Mark Elder.

Recent and future highlights include Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* and *Dido and Aeneas* with the Handel and Haydn Society, Bach's *St John Passion* with the St Paul Chamber Orchestra, Haydn's *Creation* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Il Re di Scozia *Ariodante* with the Staatstheater Stuttgart, and on tour with The English Concert, Argante *Rinaldo* with Ópera de Oviedo, Claudio *Agrippina* at Teatro de la Maestranza, *Handel's Messiah* with Les Violons du Roy in Québec and the Ottawa National Arts Centre Orchestra, a tour of Bach cantatas with the Monteverdi Choir and Sir John Eliot Gardiner, and with the Nederlandse Bachvereniging and with Early Music Vancouver, a tour of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and with Gli Angeli Genève, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* at Festival St Denis, and the roles of Herod and Father in Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Sir Andrew Davis.

On the concert platform, notable performances include Brahms' Requiem with the St Petersburg Philharmonic; Bach's B Minor Mass and Haydn's Harmoniemesse with the Dresden Staatskapelle; Nielsen's Symphony no. 3 with the Hallé Orchestra; Bach's Mass in B minor and St Matthew Passion with Collegium Vocale Gent; Bach's St John Passion with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra; Bach Cantatas with Marcus Creed and the Tonhalle-Orchester, Zurich; Elijah at the Three Choirs Festival with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Hugo Hymas

Hugo Hymas's career has so far taken him to many different parts of the world and now sees him perform more frequently away than where he is currently based in London. He has taken part in tours across Europe, USA and Asia, and recently made his first trip to Australia to perform the tenor solos in Purcell's *King Arthur* with Gabrieli Consort (Paul McCreesh).

Past concert performances include a German tour of Purcell and Handel with Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (Kristian Bezuidenhout), Handel's *Messiah* in Helsinki with The English Concert (Harry Bicket), Monteverdi's *Vespers* and Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with Dunedin Consort (John Butt), Handel's *Il Trionfo del*

Tempo e del Disinganno with Croatian Barokk Ensemble (Lawrence Cummings), Bach's *B Minor Mass* with Münchener Motettenchor (Benedikt Haag) and Handel's *Semele* with Monteverdi Choir (Sir John Eliot Gardiner) directed by Thomas Guthrie as a semi-staged concert performance for a tour which brought about his debut at Teatro alla Scala in Milan. Hugo has also performed the role of Uriel in Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* with Les Arts Florissants (William Christie) in New York and on tour in France, Bach's *Weihnachtsoratorium* in Sweden with Göteborgs Symfoniker (Andreas Sperring), and Handel's sacred oratorio *La Resurrezione* with Les Nouveaux Caractères (Sébastien d'Hérin).

Hugo's opera roles of late include Septimius in *Theodora* (Handel) for Potsdamer Winteroper, Jupiter in *Semele* (Handel) with Shanghai Symphony Orchestra (Yu Long), and Indian Boy and Fame in *The Indian Queen* (Purcell) with Opera de Lille (Emmanuelle Haïm). He has also performed the lead tenor roles in Monteverdi's *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (Aeneas), and Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. In 2017 he toured Monteverdi's three operas – *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and *L'Orfeo* – with English Baroque Soloists, which culminated with performances in the Lincoln Centre, New York. Hugo is a keen song recitalist, a former Britten-Pears young artist, and is currently on the 'Rising Stars' scheme with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, with whom he has collaborated many times.

Hugo grew up in Cambridge where he sang as a chorister in Great St Mary's Church Choir. He then studied the clarinet through school after which he joined the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge as a tenor. In 2014 he graduated with an honours degree in Music from the University of Durham.

Hebrides Ensemble

With programmes that are diverse, imaginative and inspiring, Hebrides Ensemble has established itself as one of the foremost chamber music collectives in the UK. Co-founded and led by its artistic director, the cellist and conductor William Conway, the Ensemble is renowned for its fresh and intelligent approach to programming, which places contemporary music at the heart of a diverse range of repertoire.

The Ensemble's flexibility is its strength, drawing its performers from a pool of the most outstanding musicians in the UK and beyond, ensuring the exceptional performance standards for which it has become renowned. This is an international ensemble with its roots in Scottish culture, a collective which performs regularly at

venues and festivals throughout the UK and Europe, and is regularly featured in broadcasts for BBC Radio 3. In recent years, the Ensemble has given premieres at the Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam, London's King's Place, The Wigmore Hall, Aldeburgh Festival, the Edinburgh International Festival and in 2018, made its debut appearance at the BBC Proms.

Hebrides Academy supports the next generation of performers, composers, artistic directors and cultural leaders through its mentoring programme and Hebrides Digital allows audiences around the world to be part of our performances, using live streaming and cutting-edge digital technology.

In October 2019 Hebrides Ensemble released its fourth recording in a series of composer-focused discs with Delphian. *Airs from Another Planet: Chamber music and songs by Judith Weir* follows discs profiling the works of Nigel Osborne and Peter Maxwell Davies, as well as the first recording of James MacMillan's *Since it was the day of preparation...*, which went straight to No 1 in the Specialist Classical Charts.

In December 2019, the Ensemble worked in partnership with Drake Music Scotland and composer Ben Lunn on *Diversions*, a concert showcasing works by disabled composers and including a new piece for Hebrides Ensemble together with Drake Music Scotland's Digital Orchestra. The concert was designed with accessibility at the front and centre of the creative process, and the event was recognized with multiple awards at the Scottish Awards for New Music 2020.

Dunedin Consort

Dunedin Consort is one of the world's leading Baroque ensembles, recognised for its vivid and insightful performances and recordings. Formed in 1995 and named after Din Eidyn, the ancient Celtic name for Edinburgh Castle, Dunedin Consort's ambition is to make early music relevant to the present day. Under the direction of John Butt, the ensemble has earned two coveted Gramophone Awards – for the 2007 recording of Handel's *Messiah* and the 2014 recording of Mozart's *Requiem* – and a Grammy nomination.

Dunedin Consort performs regularly at major festivals and venues across the UK, giving its BBC Proms debut in 2017 with a performance of Bach's *John Passion*. In the same year, Dunedin Consort announced its first residency at London's Wigmore Hall, complementing its regular series of events at home in Scotland, as well as throughout Europe and beyond. It enjoys close associations with the Edinburgh International Festival and Lammermuir Festival, and broadcasts frequently on BBC

Radio 3, Classic FM and BBC Scotland. The group's growing discography on Linn Records includes Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, both nominated for Gramophone Awards. Other Bach recordings include Mass in B Minor, Violin Concertos, Magnificat, Christmas Oratorio, Matthew Passion and John Passion, which was nominated for a Recording of the Year award in both Gramophone and BBC Music Magazine. A recording of Handel's *Samson*, in its first version of 1743, was released in October 2019 to wide critical acclaim.

Alongside its performance and recording work, Dunedin Consort is committed to a wide-ranging education programme both in schools and in the wider community. This annual programme of activity includes Bridging the Gap (a mentoring scheme for emerging young professional musicians), voice and instrumental clinics for non-professional performers, choral workshops for amateur singers, and an extensive programme of workshops in schools across Scotland. In inspiring and encouraging musical participation, developing vocal skills and fostering a love of classical music, historical performance and new music, Dunedin Consort aims to develop and nurture its potential audience and to encourage the performers of the future.

While Dunedin Consort is committed to performing repertoire from the Baroque and early Classical periods, and to researching specific historical performance projects, it remains an enthusiastic champion of contemporary music. In recent years, the ensemble has commissioned and premiered new music by composers including Stuart MacRae, Ailie Robertson, William Sweeney, Errollyn Wallen, Nico Muhly, Peter Nelson, Stevie Wishart and Sally Beamish. In 2019 it premiered four new co-commissions with the BBC Proms, and in 2021 will premiere *Dido's Ghost*, a new opera by Errollyn Wallen, co-commissioned with the Barbican Centre, Mahogany Opera and Buxton International Festival.

Dunedin Consort is grateful to Creative Scotland, Dunard Fund, Binks Trust and Baillie Gifford, as well as the many individual trusts and supporters who generously support its year-round programme.