

Symbolic Chiasm in Arvo Pärt's *Passio* (1982) La symbolique du chiasme dans la *Passion* de Arvo Pärt

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Résumé de l'article

Passio est la première grande fresque pour voix et orchestre d'Arvo Pärt dans le style tintinnabulant et demeure encore aujourd'hui l'une de ses œuvres les plus significatives. Dans cette mise en musique du texte de la Passion selon saint Jean, Pärt codifie les procédures du tintinnabullement, qui restera son principal moyen de communication musicale pour les années à venir, tout en illustrant une très importante perspective de la théologie de Jean. Le design compositionnel de Pärt utilise, à petite et à grande échelle, la figure du chiasme et met ainsi de l'avant l'observation de Jean dans le chapitre 18, verset 4, que le Christ connaît à l'avance tous les événements qui mèneront à sa Crucifixion. Vue sous cet éclairage, la narration de la Passion se déroule selon un plan préétabli; c'est cette subtile perspective de l'Évangile de Jean qu'Arvo Pärt révèle musicalement dans sa *Passio*. Cet article propose une analyse musicale de la *Passio* en relation avec la perspective de Jean que le Christ savait tout ce qui devait suivre. Il illustre que virtuellement chaque note est liée d'une manière ou d'une autre au pèlerinage musical de Pärt vers la Croix. À travers une lentille microscopique, l'analyse démontre comment l'utilisation que fait Pärt de la mélodie, des textures, des inversions et du tintinnabullement, crée un poignant mariage entre musique et texte biblique. Sur le plan macroscopique, elle fait voir comment les événements musicaux se déroulent dans le temps pour révéler l'inévitabilité de la Crucifixion. Elle révèle comment dans le plan tonal de l'œuvre, le développement des textures à grande échelle, les pédales et la musique des Exordium et Conclusio, le chemin de croix est présent du début à la fin. Mais l'auditeur est conduit à travers la narration de façon à ce qu'il ne prenne que rétrospectivement conscience que le point de vue particulier de l'Évangile de Jean était présent du début à la fin.

Symbolic Chiasm in Arvo Pärt's *Passio* (1982)

Mark Vuorinen

*Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him,
went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?*

John 18.4¹

Arvo Pärt's large-scale cantata *Passio* (1982) follows in the footsteps of centuries of musical settings of the biblical narrative having to do with the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. These sacred texts, by papal decree, have been part of Holy Week liturgies since the fourth century. By the ninth century, manuscripts reveal that indications for the tempo, relative pitch and volume of the recitation of these texts had been prescribed. In the twelfth century, fixed pitches for the words of the Evangelist, Christ, and the crowds had been set by using symbolic letters in the margins.² These printed rubrics are the precursors to fully composed polyphonic settings, which abound in the voice of all four Gospel-tellers from at least the fifteenth century on.³ Known as the Passion, these texts form the backbone of the Christian faith and have served as the seeds of profound musical composition for centuries. Pärt's own setting is a descendant of these centuries-old traditions, while implying a very important perspective of Johannine theology. His compositional design utilizes both small-scale and large-scale chiastic constructions and gives prominence to John's observance in Chapter 18, verse 4, that Christ knows all that will occur in the events leading to his crucifixion.⁴ Seen in this light, the Passion narrative unfolds according to a pre-ordained plan; it is this subtle perspective of the gospel that Arvo Pärt reveals in his *Passio*.

In the mid-1970s an exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union to Western Europe, and from there on to Israel, was permitted by Soviet authorities. As Arvo

1. John 18.4 (King James Bible)

2. Kurt von Fischer, "Passion", *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed November 15, 2007), www.grovemusic.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca

3. *Ibid.*

4. Chiastic Structure: a rhetorical or literary (musical) figure in which words (musical constructions) or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or in a modified form.

5. Hillier, 1997, p. 32.

6. *Ibid.*

Pärt's wife was Jewish "he was urged to take advantage of the opportunity this presented."⁵ Pärt had, in the late 1960s, become somewhat of a problem for his Soviet cultural minders that were required to approve all artistic projects.⁶ His creativity had been suppressed and his ability to travel freely was restricted. In January 1980, Pärt and his family left Estonia on a train bound for Vienna. Although, he did not want to leave his native Estonia, Pärt knew that in Western Europe he would enjoy a freedom of creativity he could not hope to know, if they remained under the authority of the Soviet regime. It is significant to note, then, that with this new freedom, the first large scale vocal work Pärt began to write after arriving in the West was a setting of the complete text of the Passion according to St. John. Using newly forged musical processes of composition, Pärt set out to capture the essence of his faith and reveal the mysteries present in John's gospel. But this text poses many challenges. Its volume alone occupies several pages of small type in modern Bibles. It is not strophic, poetic or repetitive. And the text itself does not imply any formal musical structures, the way an opera libretto might. Using the Latin Vulgate Bible, Pärt sets all of Chapter 18 and the first 30 verses of Chapter 19. The result is the seventy minute long, through-composed *Passio*, scored for SATB soloists, mixed chorus, oboe, violin, bassoon, cello and organ.

7. Hillier, 1997, p. 66.

8. For an in-depth discussion on the principles of Pärt's *Tintinnabuli* composition see Hillier, 1997, p. 86-97. The language of analysis used in this study is based on Hillier's introductory chapter on *Tintinnabuli*.

Through the 1970s Arvo Pärt was mostly silent as a composer. During these introspective years, he converted to Eastern Orthodoxy and studied Medieval and Renaissance music.⁷ When he re-emerged from this silence, it was as a radically different artist. His new compositional procedures, which he calls *Tintinnabuli*, bear far more aesthetic resemblance to the works of medieval Europe than to his own serial and collage techniques of the 1960s.⁸ *Passio* is his first large-scale vocal work in the *tintinnabuli* style and lays a blueprint to the foundations and codifies the principles that his compositional process will follow for years to come. What he allows to unfold in the *Passio*, is the very essence of his life's work.

At the heart of Pärt's setting is the text of the gospel of John. The composer has poignantly married the biblical text to the musical structures used to relate it; he has linked the text with the music so prophetically that it would be impossible to separate them. Yet, paradoxically, one could listen to virtually any isolated moment of the *Passio*, and have no way of knowing whether the music was describing Peter's effort to warm himself by a fire (John 18.18) or Christ being crucified on Golgatha (John 19.18). Though the dramatic content of the text is decidedly different, the musical material for both events (sung in both cases by the Soprano and Alto Evangelists) is vir-

tually identical. In the history of the Passion genre, there has been a tradition by composers such as Heinrich Schütz, and J.S. Bach to set the text with drama at the forefront. Like opera, for these composers, the music tells the story. Pärt's compositional process, however, does not directly reference the action taking place. Angry mob scenes are not heard in the *Passio* as they are in other settings of this text. The flogging of Christ in the hands of Pilate is not palpable as it is in the jagged rhythms of J.S. Bach's recitative in the St. John Passion⁹. Pärt eschews all temptation to paint the narrative with his compositional language. Yet, in *Passio*, the text and the music *are* inextricably linked. Pärt binds his music to John's Gospel through chiasmic designs that reveal themselves at every level. Microscopically, virtually every note is linked in some way to Pärt's musical pilgrimage to the cross. And on a macroscopic level, musical events unfold over time to reveal the inevitability of the crucifixion. The listener is taken through the narrative only to realize afterward that the Gospel's outcome was present from beginning to end. And it is through this multi-layered compositional process that Pärt symbolizes one of the important themes of Johannine theology.

At the beginning of Chapter 18, Jesus and his disciples are in the garden, where they are met by soldiers and chief priests who have come, with Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, to arrest him. What happens next, however, is a surprising and unexpected reaction by Christ. The author of the Gospel does not observe that Jesus is caught off guard, or surprised by the arrival of the soldiers. Rather, in John 18.4, he writes, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?"¹⁰ The key lies in the phrase, "knowing all things that should come upon him." Christ approaches the soldiers and chief priests calmly, knowingly, and asks, "Whom seek ye?" By looking at John's Passion in this light, the perspective of the events that unfold turn upside down. Seen this way, the key players surrounding Christ through the Passion (the soldiers, the Chief Priests, and Pilate, for example) are not aggressors; they bear no more responsibility for his crucifixion than anyone else. Rather, they are part of an unfolding plan that Christ already knows. Taking his cue from Christ's resignation, that the events of the Passion are, in fact, already in motion and will, assuredly, lead directly to the cross, Pärt creates a parallel set of chiasmic constructions that are pre-designed, and relate the mysterious events of the Passion and also lead, musically, directly to the cross.

Passio can be divided into three formal sections. The first, known historically as the *Exordium*, is only seven measures long and bears the text of the full title

9. J.S. Bach, *Johannes-Passion* (New York: Bärenreiter Urtext, 1973), Mvnt 18c, mm.26-29.

10. Taken from the King James Bible online at <http://etext.virginia.edu/kjv.browse.html>. Accessed November 15, 2007.

11. Arvo Pärt, *Passio* | *Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem* | für Soli, gemischten Chor, Instrumentalquartett und Orgel

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of the work: *Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christe secundum Joannem* (*The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John*). This introductory phrase has been a part of musical settings of the Passion for centuries and was typically set in a polyphonic motet style during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The passion music of Heinrich Schütz, for example, begins with extended polyphonic motets introducing the gospel narrative about to be heard. For Pärt, however, using his minimal resources, this Exordium lasts only a moment, but becomes an essential part of the unfolding musical architecture.¹¹

FIGURE 1 *Passio*, Exordium

1 Langsam

2 Jo 18,1

Soprani
Contralti
Tenori
Bassi

Coro

Organo

Evangelisti

Soprano
Contralto (o Contratenore)
Tenore
Basso

Haec cum di-xis-set Je-sus,

Next begins the narrative of John's gospel. This second section, by far the most substantial of the work as a whole (at approximately 68 minutes), can

be further subdivided into four roughly equal units with a short coda and comprises the entire Biblical text.¹² The final section, *the Conclusio*, mirrors the *Exordium* and sets the short non-Biblical text “*You who have suffered, have mercy upon us.*”¹³ Like the opening *Exordium*, this concluding phrase lasts barely one minute.

FIGURE 2 *Passio*, *Conclusio*

The musical score for the 'Conclusio' of the 'Passio' is presented for a Coro (Chorus) and an Organo (Organ). The Coro part is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and the Organ part is for a single organ. The tempo is 'Largo' and the dynamics range from 'pp' (pianissimo) to 'fff' (fortississimo). The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings. The lyrics are: 'Qui pas-sus es pro no-bis, mi-se-re-re no-bis. A-men.'

In choosing the voicing of the characters for the Passion’s roles, Pärt again turns to historical precedent. By the seventeenth century there was a tradition to have several voices share the role of the Evangelist, who by nature of being the storyteller bears the lion’s share of the text. Heinrich Schütz, for example, in his *Die Sieben Worte Jesu Christi am Kreuz* (*The seven last words of Christ from the Cross*) uses an ensemble cast to narrate his Passion story.¹⁴ Likewise, Pärt carefully crafts the Passion account using equally the voices of a solo quartet of Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. And in a modern addition, Pärt uniquely adds four instruments to the ensemble of storyteller. Solo violin, obœ, cello and bassoon are treated not as accompaniment, but as Evangelists,

12. *Passio*, Rehearsal 2-172 (inclusive).

13. *Passio*, Rehearsal 173.

14. Heinrich Schütz (1934), *Die Sieben Worte Jesu Christi am Kreuz*, New York, Eulenburg, Ltd.

whose presence in the story telling and musical architecture is every bit as crucial as the solo voices that carry the text.

For the roles of the other characters, Pärt makes traditional choices and gives the words of Christ to a bass accompanied by the organ. The words of Pilate are sung by a tenor and a four part mixed chorus takes the role of the crowd and that of minor solo characters, such as Peter. These relatively modest resources are all that Pärt will require for the telling of his Passion as he reveals the path of Christ to the cross.

At ground level, Pärt develops miniature chiasmic forms as though to foreshadow the large-scale constructions that develop over the course of the work. Pärt's use of melody is the first parameter to distinguish itself as having chiasmic tendencies. His melodic material can best be described as simple and mostly scalar. That of the Evangelist, for example, is tonally centred on A and moves mostly conjunctly, around the central pitch, leaping from 'A' only to return immediately by step-wise motion.¹⁵

15. *Passio*, Rehearsal 2-4,
Evangelist: Basso.

FIGURE 3 *Passio*, Rehearsal 2-4

The musical score for Figure 3 consists of two systems. The top system is for the Evangelist, with four staves labeled Soprano, Contralto (o Contratenore), Tenore, and Basso. The bottom system is for the Organ (Organo), with four staves. The lyrics are: Haec cum di-xis-set Je-sus, e-gres-sus est cum dis-ci-pu-lis suis trans Torrentem Cedron.

The Evangelist's part is in a 2/4 time signature, with a tempo marking of approximately 132. The Organ part is in a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are: Haec cum di-xis-set Je-sus, e-gres-sus est cum dis-ci-pu-lis suis trans Torrentem Cedron.

Pärt will begin to develop musically by adding to the texture in one of two ways, both of which have chiastic implications. First, Pärt adds a “*Tintinnabuli* voice.” This second voice is entirely triadic, and may or may not be centred tonally on the same pitch as the melodic voice. In Paul Hillier’s excellent description of the *tintinnabuli* style, he illustrates the intrinsic relationship shared by the melodic and *tintinnabuli* voices. He suggests that,

the harmonic framework has been tilted sideways to form a musical line and the relationship between two different kinds of melodic movement creates a harmonic resonance which is essentially the triad and fluctuating attendance of diatonic dissonances. What we hear might be best described as a single moment spread out in time.¹⁶

Once could conversely argue that in light of the symbolic importance of the melodic-*tintinnabuli* relationship that we hear not only a ‘single moment spread out in time’, but also an eternity at every instant. In *Passio*, this relationship is demonstrated early on by the texture created when the tenor and bass parts of the Evangelist sound together.¹⁷

16. Hillier, 1997, p. 90.

17. *Passio*, Rehearsal 7, Evangelist: Tenore & Basso.

FIGURE 4 *Passio*, Rehearsal 7

Figure 4 shows a musical score for Rehearsal 7 of *Passio*. The score is for the Evangelist (Evg.) and features a complex rhythmic structure with time signatures 3/4, 2/4, 4/4, 2/4, 1/4, 4/4, 3x4/4, and 3x2/4. The vocal parts (Tenore & Basso) are shown with lyrics: 'qui - a frequenter Jesus con - ve - ne - rat illuc cum discipulis su - is.' The instrumental parts (Vc. and Fg.) are shown at the bottom.

What makes this particular relationship chiastic is the position of the *tintinnabuli* voice relative to that of the melody voice. Using the triadic pitches of an A minor chord, the *tintinnabuli* voice alternates meticulously between the closest pitch above the melody, and the closest pitch below the melody. Hillier refers to this particular relationship as 1st position-alternating.¹⁸ This association creates a texture in which the *tintinnabuli* voice is reflected in

18. Hillier, 1997, p. 133.

itself, using the melody voice as the point of reflection. In *Passio*, 1st position-alternating is by far the most common use of the *tintinnabuli* voice. In fact, Pärt creates voice pairings that share this relationship exclusively. Figure 5 shows these relationships.

FIGURE 5 Exclusive use of first position alternating in *Passio*

Melody	Tintinnabuli
Evangelist: Bass	Evangelist: Tenor
Evangelist: Alto	Evangelist: Soprano
Evangelist: Bassoon	Evangelist: Cello
Chorus: Alto	Chorus: Soprano
Chorus: Bass	Chorus: Tenor

Pärt adds a second layer to these mirrored or chiastic relationships. In the case of the chorus, which has all four vocal forces sounding at all times, the duet of *tintinnabuli* voices (i.e., Soprano and Tenor), themselves share a chiastic relationship. While their pitches are determined by their respective melody voices (i.e., Alto and Bass), they are connected to one another by a second internal relationship. When the soprano *tintinnabuli* voice is sounding *below* the alto melody voice, the tenor *tintinnabuli* voice is sounding *above* the bass melody voice.¹⁹

19. *Passio*, Rehearsal 14, Chorus.

FIGURE 6 *Passio*, Rehearsal 14

5
4

4 x 6
4

Coro

Je - sum

Na - za - re - num.

Je - sum

Na - za - re - num.

The opposite is also true. This relationship is consistent and remains for the entire work. The same relationships also exist in the music of the Evangelist when all four vocal parts are sounding.²⁰

The second method by which Pärt uses melody to foreshadow larger chiasmic designs is through inversion. Melody voices within the same textual element are created as inversions of themselves. As an example, the vocal writing for the Evangelist consists of two melody voices: Bass and Alto. Every time they are heard together, the Alto voice is a note for note inversion of the Bass.²¹

FIGURE 7 *Passio*, Rehearsal 10

Likewise, the melody voices of the Chorus are inversions at the octave of one another.²² The two voices move, oppositely, yet as one, emphasizing the centrality of their tonal home.

The words of Christ are also designed to be delivered in inversion. Christ's text is always accompanied by the organ and the texture of the organ is always the same. It consists of four separate voices. Two of the voices always sustain an open Perfect 5th on E and B. The octave placements of the fifth rotate through four different positions. A third voice is always an intervallic inversion of the melody sung by Jesus. The inverted melody, however, is made more striking because it is heard at the 5th rather than the octave.²³

20. *Passio*, Rehearsal 13, Evangelist.

21. *Passio*, Rehearsal 10, Alto and Bass.

22. *Passio*, Rehearsal 14, Chorus.

23. *Passio*, Rehearsal 12, Jesus.

FIGURE 8 *Passio*, Rehearsal 12

Jesus

4/4 3x4/4

Quem quae-ri - tis?

Org.

4/4 3x4/4

The fourth voice is a *tintinnabuli* voice. It is in the 1st position-alternating form and is related to the inverted melody voice. Its octave placement alternates with each phrase Christ sings; it appears either at pitch with the melodic inversion of Christ's words, or one octave lower.

The techniques discussed above, with respect to alternating *tintinnabuli* voices and inversion of the melodic material are not unique to *Passio*. However, this work is his first large-scale piece in the *Tintinnabuli* style and he employs the techniques fastidiously throughout the work. In this way, Pärt not only makes chiastic design a defining dimension of the work, but also sets a precedent of formal structure that many of his later works will follow.

Thus far only small-scale chiastic structures have been discussed. These forms are independent of other voices and can be pinpointed at virtually any place in the work. They are fully realized in individual bars, notes and chords. Pärt, however, also generates several macroscopic gestures, which unfurl slowly and take time to reach fulfillment. These are formal designs that are only revealed when considering the work as a whole. Well used in music, this concept is not a creation of Pärt, but it is an appropriate formal construction for Passion music. The etymology of chiasm begins with the Greek letter Chi, which is in the shape of the cross. And in *Passio*, the chiastic design is the link to an association with the cross. In *Passio*, Pärt uses tonal centres, texture, instrumentation and pedal tones to create macroscopic chiastic designs. In addition, he bookends the work with introductory and concluding material that itself is chiastic.

Pärt assigns a tonal centre to each constituent part of the Passion narrative. The eight voices of the Evangelist, for example, always centre both their melodic and *tintinnabuli* voices around A. Figure 9 indicates the tonal centres of all constituent parts for the entire work.

FIGURE 9 Tonal centres in *Passio*

	Exordium	Evangelist	Jesus	Pilate	Chorus	Conclusio
Melody	A	A	E	B	B	D (A)
Tintinnabuli	A	A	A	F	E	D

Once a tonal centre has been established for a particular voice, it does not change. And in his tonal design Pärt reveals the central theme of the work. When all tonal centres are considered, E emerges as the central pitch. Significantly, it is the words of Christ that are centred on this medial pitch. The following diagram illustrates the tonal centres and their intervallic relationship to one another.



By examining the diagram, a highly symbolic pattern of equidistant tonal centres emerges. The distance from the outside tonal centres to the middle (i.e., B to E, A to E) is a perfect 4th, while the internal intervallic relationships create a series of 2nds and 3rds. Traditionally, these distances are symbolic of the cross; four is the number of points to a cross, while the ratio of 2:3 traditionally indicates the relative length relationship of the horizontal and vertical beams. Pärt takes the entire length of the work to reveal this chiastic structure as the tonal centre on D is not heard until the final seven measures.

Pärt continues a chiastic-centered design through his use of texture. The text and music of the Evangelist is shared by a quartet of singers and four solo instruments whose use is governed by a carefully organized centric plan. Figure 10 indicates the order in which instruments and voices are added and subtracted and the total number of lines present at any time.

FIGURE 10 The order in which voices/instruments are added/subtracted in each of the 4 sections of narrative

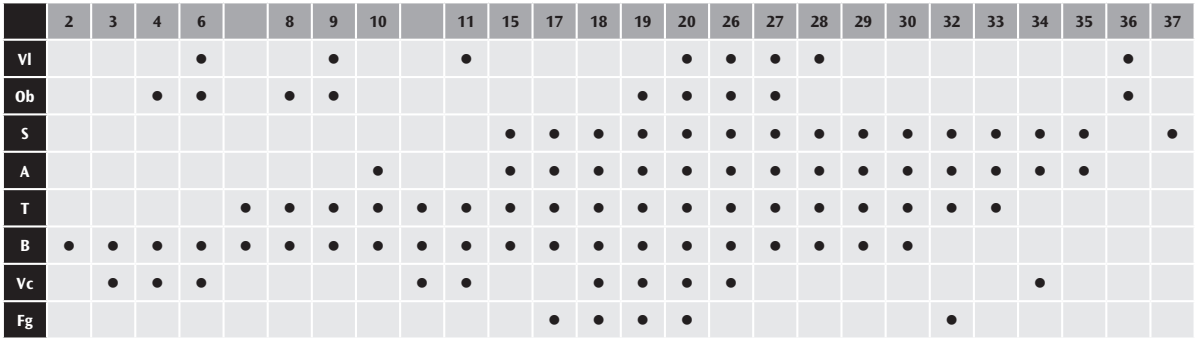
Voice	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	1
Instruments	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	2	3	4	3	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Total in texture	1	2	3	4	2	3	4	3	4	4	5	6	7	8	7	6	5	4	4	3	3	2	2	1

Pärt gradually increases the total number of voices from 1 to 8 and then returns again to a solo voice through subtraction. This exact pattern of addition and subtraction is repeated four times to delineate four sections of

24. The division of text into four roughly equal sections is as follows: Rehearsal 2-37, 37-76, 77-131,132-176.

narrative.²⁴ Again, the number four, as the number of points to a cross becomes prominent. Figure 11 illustrates the use of texture in section one of the Evangelist’s narrative.

FIGURE 11 Use of the Evangelist ‘voice’ in section one of *Passio*



25. *Passio*, Rehearsal 2-20, Evangelist: Bass.

26. *Passio*, Rehearsal 20-37, Evangelist: Soprano.

Beginning with the Bass voice, Pärt adds to the texture until all 8 voices are present at rehearsal 20. As the music continues, voices and instruments become tacet until only the soprano remains. Pärt’s design gives equal opportunity to all voices. In section one the bass begins alone and is present for the entire first half of section one.²⁵ After the tutti at rehearsal 20, the texture inverts making the soprano the central voice.²⁶ Interestingly, the arrival of the tutti in each of the four sections, does not coincide with any particularly important part in the text. It is not at dramatic points that Pärt uses all of his musical resources. Rather, they are four pre-conceived reminders that Christ “knowing all things that should come upon him,” allows the events of the story to unfold as planned.

Related to texture is the order in which Pärt uses the voices. The addition and subtraction of the Evangelists vocal forces is pre-designed as well. Figure 12 shows the order in which the Evangelists’ voices are added and subtracted in each of the four sections.

FIGURE 12 Addition and subtraction of Evangelists’ voice parts

	Addition	Subtraction	Point Of Inversion	Addition	Subtraction
Section 1 & 2	BTAS	BTAS		SATB	SATB
Section 3 & 4	TBSA	TBSA		ASBT	ASBT

The BTASBTAS pattern taken from entry and exit points in sections one (as shown in figure 12) is mirrored by the entry and exit points of the textual section that follows. Likewise, the patterns for sections three and four are inversely related to one another. In texture, Pärt has deliberately created multi-layered structures that reveal themselves at different intervals. The texture patterns of figure 10, for example, are revealed four times throughout the work, while the order of voice use pattern emerges only twice in the same amount of time. These inter-connected chiasmic plans rely on one another to materialize, yet each one is revealed at double the temporal interval of the other.

The character of Pilate also contributes to Pärt’s formal design. As though to suggest Pilate’s acquiescence as a player in this drama, Pärt uses the extensive dialogue of Pilate during Christ’s trial to reveal another layer of his chiasm. Pilate’s fifteen entrances are always accompanied by the organ. The texture of this accompaniment changes throughout the work as does the quality of the vocal line that Pärt creates for Pilate to sing. Most important to Pärt’s chiasmic design are the seven of Pilate’s fifteen phrases that are accompanied by a pedal tone.

FIGURE 13 Voice of Pilate-alternates between Melody and Tintinnabuli

Rehearsal #	68	72	78	82	86	90	93	105	108	113	119	122	131	135	151
M/T	(M	T	M)	M	M	M	M	T	T	T	M	M	(T	M	T)
PEDAL Pitch		B	→	F	→	B	→	E	←	B	←	F	←		B

Figure 13 illustrates the pitches of the pedal tones used and their relative location in the score. Pilate’s tonal centres (from figure 9) are on B and F, so pedal tones on those pitches are not surprising. What is unique, however, is that the central pedal tone at rehearsal 105 is not on B or F, but on E. This pitch is theologically significant in *Passio* as it is both the medial tonal centre of the work and also the tonal centre for the words of Christ. It is on this entrance that Pilate reveals to the crowds that he has reconciled with the truth. About Christ, Pilate says, “Behold, I bring him forth to you, that you may know that I find no fault in him.”²⁷ (see figure 14)

27. *Passio*, Rehearsal 105, Pilate.

FIGURE 14 *Passio*, Rehearsal 105

In this subtle use of pedal, Pärt symbolically acknowledges Pilate's role in the unfolding events. One might think the use of an E pedal at this point is striking and, indeed, the dissonances created as the pedal E collides with the F major triadic pitches of Pilate's *tintinnabuli* voice are extraordinary. But the listener cannot possibly be aware of the centrality of that E pedal until Pilate has delivered all fifteen of his entrances. It is only in hindsight that a listener can be aware that Pilate's role in the *Passio* has been unfolding as part of a greater plan.

Finally, Pärt's chiasmic blueprint, both opens and closes the work as a bookend. The two non-biblical texts in the work, separated by 68 minutes of Biblical narrative, are direct inversions of one another. These introductory and concluding sections are the only music in the *Passio* with a tempo marking; *Langsam* marks the tempo for the beginning and *Largo* for the end.²⁸ Both sections last for seven measures and are scored for chorus and organ. And most poignantly, the unfinished melodic material of the first is answered by the second. In the *Exordium*, the melodic material consists of a descending scale from A to B. At the conclusion, Pärt finishes what he began by fashioning the final minute of the work around a scalar melody that ascends from A to G: a note for note inversion of the opening. What began as the first large-scale chiasmic design reaches completion only as the final notes of the *Passio* are heard.

From beginning to end, Pärt has created a work full of symbolic meaning. From the opening chords of the *Exordium* to the final sounds of his *Passio*, Pärt profoundly acknowledges John's observance that Christ knew all things

28. *Passio*, Rehearsal 1, *Exordium* & Rehearsal 173, *Conclusio*.

that would come upon him. Having gained musical freedom by fleeing the Soviet Union in 1980, Pärt turns quickly to this most sacred of Christian texts. In *Passio*, he codifies procedures of *Tintinnabuli* that will remain his principle means of musical communication for years to come. These compositional techniques, which began as experiments with sound in his last years in Estonia, grow into full maturity in *Passio*. Using both large- and small-scale chiasmic structures, Pärt foreshadows Christ's crucifixion at every level of his composition. And, while acknowledging over a thousand years of liturgical tradition in his *Passio*, Pärt forges a new musical language that is intimately connected to the texts it sets.

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