

Program 3

Fratres for Violin, Strings and Percussion

Arvo Pärt (born in 1935)

Composed in 1977.

Arvo Pärt, born on September 11, 1935 in Paide, Estonia, fifty miles southeast of Tallinn, graduated from the Tallinn Conservatory in 1963 while working as a recording director in the music division of the Estonian Radio. A year before leaving the Conservatory, he won first prize in the All-Union Young Composers' Competition for a children's cantata and an oratorio. In 1980, he emigrated to Vienna, where he took Austrian citizenship; since 1982, he has made his home in West Berlin. Pärt's many distinctions include the Artistic Award of the Estonian Society in Stockholm, Scholarship Award of the Musagetis Society in Zurich, honorary memberships in the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, American Academy of Arts and Letters, and Belgium's Royal Academy of Arts, five Grammy nominations, honorary doctorates from the universities of Sydney, Tartu, Durham and the Music Academy of Tallinn, Order of the Estonian State Second Class, Herder Award conferred by the University of Vienna, and recognition as a *Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres de la République Française*.

Pärt's earliest works show the influence of the Soviet music of Prokofiev and Shostakovich, but beginning in 1960 with *Necrology* for Orchestra, he adopted the serial principles of Schoenberg. This procedure quickly exhausted its interest for him, however, and, for a fruitful period in the mid-1960s during which he produced a cello concerto, the Second Symphony and the *Collage on BACH* for Orchestra, he explored the techniques of collage and quotation. Criticized by government authorities for the religious content of several of his works and still dissatisfied with the stylistic basis of his music, he abandoned creative work for several years, during which time he devoted himself to the study of the music of such Medieval and Renaissance composers as Machaut, Ockeghem, Obrecht and Josquin. Guided by the spirit and method of those ancient masters, Pärt broke his compositional silence in 1976 with the small piano piece *Für Alina*, which utilizes quiet dynamics, rhythmic stasis and open-interval and triadic harmonies to create a thoughtful mood of mystical introspection reflecting the composer's personal piety. His subsequent works, all of which eschew electronic tone production in favor of traditional instruments and voices, have been written in this pristine, otherworldly style inspired by Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony, and seek to unite ancient and modern ages in music that seems rapt out of time.

Pärt calls his manner of composition "tintinnabulation," from the Latin word for bells. "Tintinnabulation," the composer explains, "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. Tintinnabulation is like this. Here, I am alone with silence. I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comfort me. I work with very few elements — with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials — with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I call it tintinnabulation."

Fratres was composed in 1977 for string quintet and wind quintet, and first performed by the Estonian early music ensemble "Hortus musicus." Pärt has subsequently adapted the work for many other solo and ensemble combinations of strings, winds and percussion. The version of *Fratres* for violin, strings and percussion retains the work's formal and harmonic framework, but allows the solo voice to soar around it and comment upon it in a sort of musical exegesis that reflects new light upon these somber strains.

Fratres is based on the repetitions of an austere, hymnal theme played above a continuous drone on the interval of an open fifth. The repetitions (eight in the original version), separated by notes played as or simulating drum taps, are transposed downward a minor or major third on each appearance, so that the sonority grows lower and richer as *Fratres* unfolds. The dynamic peak is reached in the middle of the work, after which the music is gradually overtaken by silence to end in a state of hushed spirituality. The work's title — "*Brothers*" — seems to indicate that this music was inspired by the vision of a solemn procession of Medieval monks, wending their way by flickering candlelight along the ambulatory to the abbey's chapels for another of the endless succession of services that regulated their monastic lives.

Percussion Concerto No. 1, "Arena"

Tobias Broström (born in 1978)

Composed in 2004.

Premiered on May 6, 2004 in Malmö, conducted by Christoph König with Johan Bridger as soloist.

Tobias Broström, born in 1978 in the coastal city of Helsingborg in southwestern Sweden, became fascinated with the percussion instruments as a child. He started performing during his early teen years and quickly assimilated

a wide range of rock, jazz, classical and contemporary influences — he wrote his first piece, an invention for marimba in the style of Bach, at age thirteen. Broström earned a degree in percussion at the Malmö Academy of Music (“I chickened out of applying for the composition classes,” he confessed, “because I thought that it was by far the most difficult thing you could go in for”), but HE did study composition formally with the Swede Rolf Martinsson and the Italian Luca Francesconi. Broström joined the faculty of the Sundsgården Folk High School in Helsingborg in 2003 to teach composition, arranging and theory, and established his reputation as a composer the following year with the premiere of his Percussion Concerto No. 1, “Arena,” by soloist Johan Bridger and the Malmö Symphony Orchestra and its subsequent recording on the Caprice label. In addition to numerous compositions for percussion, Broström has also written works for orchestra, film, dance, chamber ensembles and electronic sources that have been performed by noted soloists and ensembles throughout Scandinavia and are increasingly being heard abroad. In 2004, Broström was awarded the Rosenborg-Gehrman Composition Scholarship and he has since received grants from the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm (2004–2006), Swedish Performing Rights Society (2006) and Swedish Composers Society (2009); in 2006, he was appointed Composer-in-Residence with the Gävle Symphony Orchestra.

The composer writes, “The Percussion Concerto No. 1, subtitled ‘Arena,’ comprises two movements, each of which is divided into distinct sections. A large array of percussion instruments is arranged in three separate stations, and it is when the soloist moves from one station to the other that the image is evoked of the ‘arena’ that lent the work its name. Since each station possesses its own arrangement of instruments, the different sections of the Concerto have their own unique sounds. The first movement opens with a burst of extreme violence, with the soloist’s percussion rig placed at the back, raised between the orchestral percussion section and the timpani. The thematic material is thus presented and the movement gradually comes to an end stage-front in the second station, which includes a waterphone, a brass instrument comprising rods of different lengths that are played with a bow. A lengthy opening section of the second movement is dominated by the third station’s marimba (which is placed on the other side of the podium), played with great virtuosity before the soloist returns to the percussion combo of the first station, ushered there by additional percussionists in an explosion of pyrotechnics. The soloist emerges from the orchestra’s percussion section to eventually take over and launch into a cadenza. The Concerto ends its 27-minute journey where it began, at the set-up at the back of the stage.”

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Composed 1901-1902.

Premiered on March 8, 1902 in Helsinki, conducted by the composer.

At the turn of the 20th century, two pressing concerns were foremost in the thoughts of Jean Sibelius — his country and his compositions. His home, Finland, was experiencing a surge of nationalistic pride that called for independence and recognition after eight centuries of domination by Sweden and Russia, and he enthusiastically lent his philosophical and artistic support to the movement. In the 1890s, when Sibelius was still in his twenties, he was drawn into a group called “The Symposium,” a coterie of young Helsinki intellectuals who championed the cause of Finnish nationalism. Of them, Sibelius noted, “The ‘Symposium’ evenings were a great resource to me at a time when I might have stood more or less alone. The opportunity of exchanging ideas with kindred souls, animated by the same spirit and the same objectives, exerted an extremely stimulating influence on me, confirmed in me my purpose, gave me confidence.” The group’s interest in native legends, music, art and language incited in the young composer a deep feeling for his homeland that blossomed in such early works as *En Saga*, *Kullervo*, *Karelia* and *Finlandia*. The ardent patriotism of those stirring musical testaments became a rallying point and an inspiration to Finns, and they earned Sibelius a hero’s reputation among his countrymen.

In 1900, Sibelius was given a specific way in which to further the cause of both his country and his music. In that year, the conductor Robert Kajanus led the Helsinki Philharmonic through Europe to the Paris Exhibition on a tour whose purpose was less artistic recognition than a bid for international sympathy for Finnish political autonomy. As Sibelius’ music figured prominently in the tour repertory, he was asked to join the entourage as assistant to Kajanus. The tour was a success: for the orchestra and its conductor, for Finland, and especially for Sibelius, whose works it brought to a wider audience than ever before. Music and politics usually make contentious bedfellows, but on this occasion they achieved a fortuitous symbiosis.

A year later Sibelius was again travelling. Through a financial subscription raised by Axel Carpelan, he was able to spend the early months of 1901 in Italy away from the rigors of the Scandinavian winter. So inspired was he by the culture, history and beauty of the sunny south (as had been Goethe and Brahms) that he envisioned a work based on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. However, a second symphony to follow the First of 1899 was gestating, and the Dante work was eventually abandoned. Sibelius was well launched on the new Symphony by the time he left for home. He made two important stops before returning to Finland. The first was at Prague, where he met Dvorák and was impressed with the famous musician’s humility and friendliness. The second stop was at the June Music Festival in Heidelberg, where the enthusiastic reception given to his compositions enhanced the budding European reputation

that he had achieved during the Helsinki Philharmonic tour of the preceding year. Still flush with the success of this 1901 tour when he arrived home, he decided he was secure enough financially (thanks in part to an annual stipend initiated in 1897 by the Finnish government) to leave his teaching job and devote himself full-time to composition. Though it was to be almost two decades before Finland became independent of Russia as a result of the First World War, Sibelius had come into the full ripeness of his genius by the time of the Second Symphony. So successful was the premiere of the work on March 8, 1902 that it had to be repeated at three successive concerts in a short time to satisfy the clamor for further performances.

Because of the milieu in which the Second Symphony arose, there have been several attempts to read into it a specific, nationalistic program, including one by Georg Schneevoight, a conductor and friend of the composer. The intention of this Symphony, he wrote, "was to depict in the first movement the quiet pastoral life of the Finns, undisturbed by the thought of oppression. The second movement is charged with patriotic feeling, but the thought of a brutal rule over the people brings with it timidity of soul. The third, a scherzo, portrays the awakening of national feeling in the people and the desire to organize in defense of their rights. In the finale hope enters their breasts and there is comfort in the anticipated coming of a deliverer!" As late as 1946, the Finnish musicologist Ilmari Kronn posited that the Symphony depicted "Finland's struggle for political liberty." Sibelius insisted such descriptions misrepresented his intention — that it was his tone poems and not his symphonies which were based on specific programs. This Symphony, he maintained, was pure, abstract expression and not meant to conjure any definite meaning. As with any great work, however, Sibelius' Second Symphony can inspire many different interpretations, and the Finns have an understandable devotion to Schneevoight's patriotic view of the music despite Sibelius' words — it is the piece most often performed at Finnish state occasions.

The influence of German and Russian music bears heavily on the first two symphonies of Sibelius. Echoes of the works of Tchaikovsky and Borodin and, to a lesser extent, Brahms are frequent. However, the style is unmistakably Sibelian in its melodic and timbral attributes, and even in the distinctive technique of concentrated thematic development that was to flower fully in the following symphonies. The first movement is modeled on the classical sonata form. As introduction, the strings present a chordal motive that courses through and unifies much of the movement. A bright, folk-like strain for the woodwinds and a hymnal response from the horns constitute the opening theme. The second theme exhibits one of Sibelius' most characteristic constructions — a long held note that intensifies to a quick rhythmic flourish. This theme and a complementary one of angular leaps and unsettled tonality close the exposition and figure prominently in the ensuing development. A stentorian brass chorale closes this section and leads to the recapitulation, a compressed restatement of the earlier themes.

The second movement, though closely related to sonatina form (sonata without development), is best heard as a series of dramatic paragraphs whose strengths lie not just in their individual qualities but also in their powerful juxtapositions. The opening statement is given by bassoons in hollow octaves above a bleak accompaniment of timpani with cellos and basses in pizzicato notes. The upper strings and then full orchestra take over the solemn plaint, but soon inject a new, sharply rhythmic idea of their own which calls forth a halting climax from the brass choir. After a silence, the strings intone a mournful motive that soon engenders another climax. A soft timpani roll begins the series of themes again, but in expanded presentations with fuller orchestration and greater emotional impact.

The third movement is a three-part form whose lyrical, unhurried central trio, built on a repeated note theme, provides a strong contrast to the mercurial surrounding scherzo. The slow music of the trio returns as a bridge to the closing movement, one of the most inspiring finales in the entire symphonic literature. It has a grand sweep and uplifting spirituality that make it one of the last unadulterated flowerings of the great Romantic tradition. Of this work, David Ewen wrote, "It has the ardor, passion and vitality of youth; it overflows with sensual lyricism and Slavic sentimentality; it is dramatized by compelling climaxes and irresistible rhythmic drive." To which Milton Cross added, simply, "It has an overwhelming emotional impact."

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