

SUSPENSION:

A SERIES OF MUSICAL REFLECTIONS

No:16

Well, here we are again. It was around this time last year that I wrote my first SUSPENSION, and it seemed only right to resume for a few more entries this Holy Week.

Today's first entry for Palm Sunday is 'The Woman with the Alabaster Box', written by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt in 1997. Taking as its basis words from the Bible, like many of last year's SUSPENSIONS, this choral work elaborates Matthew's retelling of the Anointing at Bethany, an often-overlooked moment in the Palm Sunday story. In today's early morning Communion Service, Ann spoke of the importance of Mary's gesture, its significance within its historic context, and the ways in which we might understand and simulate this act of worship in our lives today.

Here, Pärt's writing imbues the text with further meaning. In telling these events through the voices of the Sopranos and Altos in the choir, with the objections of the male disciples heard amongst the Tenors and Basses, Pärt seeks to carry forward Jesus' message to Judas, that the mode of worship and discipleship exemplified by the early women of the church might resonate throughout the world.¹

Something to listen out for in this piece: Pärt's very own distinct musical language, otherwise called his *Tintinnabuli* style. Pärt's website describes this 'as a style in which the musical material is extremely concentrated, reduced only to the most important' elements of musical structure – melody and triad. This musical style is attributed to his own personal ideology, 'a very personal and deeply sensed attitude to life for the composer, based on Christian values, religious practice and a quest for truth, beauty and purity'.² Further information on this piece, the composer, and his style can be found in the links below.

Enjoy,
Sarah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=402WEBVDiU8>

¹ <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/work/497/>

² <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/biography/>