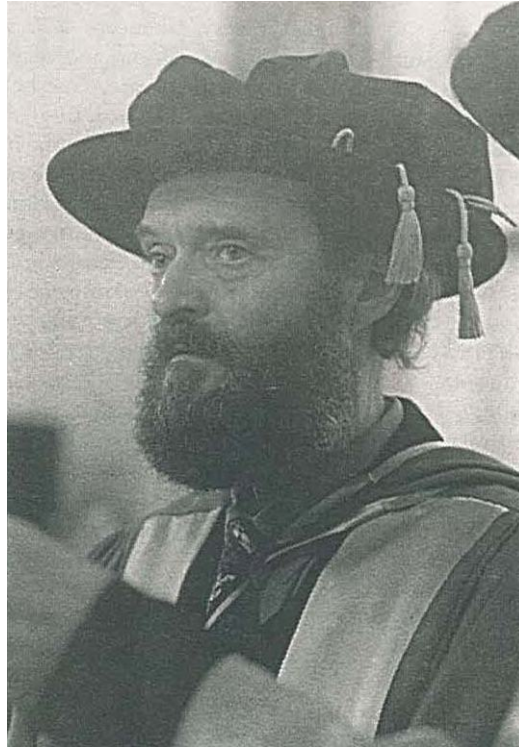


## Mr Arvo Pärt

The degree of Doctor of Music (*honoris causa*) was conferred upon renowned Estonian composer Arvo Pärt at the ceremony held on 28 September 1996.

After the degree was conferred, Pärt's 'Pari Intervallo' was performed by University organist Norman Johnston, and later that evening in the Great Hall, six of Pärt's works were performed in a concert featuring soloists Roger Woodward, John Harding and Dene Olding. Pärt was in Australia as artist-in-residence for the Sydney Spring Festival.



Arvo Pärt, photo, Tracey Schramm, 'The University of Sydney News', 17 October 1996.

### Citation

*Presented by the Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor D J Anderson*

Chancellor

We honour today Arvo Pärt, a renowned composer with a rare aural sensitivity.

'Here I am alone with silence' he wrote. 'I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. My aim as a musician is to choose tones according to my nature, according to my inclination and my inner state'.

During the 1996 world music season, international festivals which were exclusively devoted to the music of Arvo Pärt were held in the UK, USA, Germany, Sweden, Estonia, France, Italy and Switzerland. His work has been aptly described as 'Sacred music for a secular age'.

Arvo Pärt was born in Paide, Estonia, in 1935, where he studied composition with Heino Ellar at the Conservatorium in Tallinn, from which he graduated in 1963. His first orchestral work, *Nekrolog*, opus 5, in 1959, was dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust and was followed two years later by the childrens' cantata *Our Garden* and the oratorio *Stride of the World*. These two choral settings earned him attention as the recipient of the USSR's Young Composers' Prize in 1962. Even at this stage it was evident that boldness and clarity of thought, richness of invention and stylistic mobility were the salient features of his music.

A series of major orchestral works followed, including *Perpetuum Mobile* in 1963; the first of three *Symphonies* in 1964, *Pro et Contra*, a *Cello Concerto*, in 1966 and *Credo* for chorus and orchestra, which was a landmark.

Arvo Pärt worked as a recording engineer for Estonian Radio from 1958 to 1967 and as a composer for television and film. This added a clear sense of practicality to his aural sensitivity. During this period of exploration he studied mediaeval and Renaissance music, plainsong and organum, whilst composing modern masterpieces of austere but sensuous economy, combined with spiritual beauty and depth.

In 1976 he composed a very brief but masterful piano piece, entitled simply: *Für Alina*, which in the words of the composer 'was on a new plateau. It was here that I discovered the triad series'. Arvo Pärt developed a unique style from this piece, called *Tintinnabuli*, a word that evokes the feeling of bells; the bells' complex but rich sonorous mass of overtones; the gradual unfolding of patterns implicit in the music itself and the idea of a sound which is simultaneously static and in a state of flux.

In the same year a micropolyphonic work for piano, strings and winds followed, entitled *If Bach kept Bees*. Two instrumental masterpieces from 1977: *Tabula rasa* (which received the Estonian Music Prize in 1978) and *Fratres*, brought Arvo Pärt worldwide acclaim. Both works extended the 'tintinnabulation' style and the compositions which followed - *Passio*, *Summa*, *Cantus*, *Litany*, *Introductory Prayers* and *Psalom*, displayed an increasing influence of the Russian Orthodox Faith.

In 1980 Arvo Pärt decided to emigrate with his wife and children to Israel, but, stopping in Vienna, he received a generous grant from the Deutsche Akademischer Austauschdienst. He then travelled to Berlin where he has lived since 1982. From this point Pärt's work increasingly focused on the setting of liturgical texts. Since 1985 his compositional output has been almost exclusively centred around liturgical music, including major settings of the *St John Passion* (the recording of which won the Netherland's Edison Award and the Tokyo Academy Award) and settings of the *Mass*, *Miserere*, *Cantus*, *Stabat Mater*, *Magnificat* and *Te Deum*.

Arvo Pärt's works have been performed by such artists as Gidon Kremer, the Hilliard Ensemble, the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Tatiana Gridenko, Alfred Schnittke, Neeme Jarvi, Andreas Kahler, the Berlin Philharmonic, Die Staat Orchester Stuttgart, Keith Jarrett, Roger Woodward, the Kronos Quartet, and all the major European and American Orchestras.

This year Arvo Pärt became a fellow of the American Academy of Arts.

During a sensitive performance of Pärt's music the listener may feel at the edge of the unknown in some timeless zone where everything is about to begin. That sense of the slate having been cleared, gives one of Pärt's most famous pieces its title, an expression he uses to describe the process of composition:

'When I begin a new work' writes Pärt, 'I have to start from scratch again, from nothing. I have to be cleared of everything: tabula rasa.'

If Pärt the composer needs a clean slate on which to begin a musical composition, his culinary compositions are created from very different sources, and are designed to appeal to other senses. Pärt, the chef, creates a cornucopia, a horn of plenty, so attractively produced for the palate and sumptuously displayed to the eye that it demands to be reduced to a tabula rasa!

Chancellor, it is my great pleasure to present to you the distinguished composer Arvo Pärt, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Music, honoris causa.