

Arvo Pärt's Spiritual Imagination Infuses an Exciting Disc From Glorïae dei Cantores

BY STEVEN WINN , May 11, 2020

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Glorïae dei Cantores

Solemnity. Silence. Spiritual immersion. Spatial dimension. Centuries-old styles.

Tags for the Estonian composer **Arvo Pärt**, 84, come easily to mind — perhaps too easily. Listeners may think they know what they're in for before they've actually listened.

In a substantial and gratifying recording by the Massachusetts ensemble **Glorïae dei Cantores**, it's the variety of Pärt's expressive powers over many decades, not the sameness, that shines through in six sacred works. From plainsong-like purity to multivoiced clusters that float entrancingly into and out of dissonance, the composer's affinity for the human voice covers the spectrum. The writing for string instruments is wonderfully diverse as well, with surges of 19th-century lyricism set off by patient minimalism and perky pizzicato gambits.

Titled **Stabat Mater**, for the single longest work on the program, the Naxos disc showcases both virtuosic solo singing and ensemble cohesion. The whole is the sum and then some of its excellent constituent parts. Richard K. Pugsley conducts with clarity, sensitivity, and an instinct for high-impact moments.

Right from the top of the recording, in the brief *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem*, Pärt's gift for animating a text bears rich fruit. Sopranos Rachel McKendree and Sr. Armanda Ortoloni, ethereal yet urgent, sing



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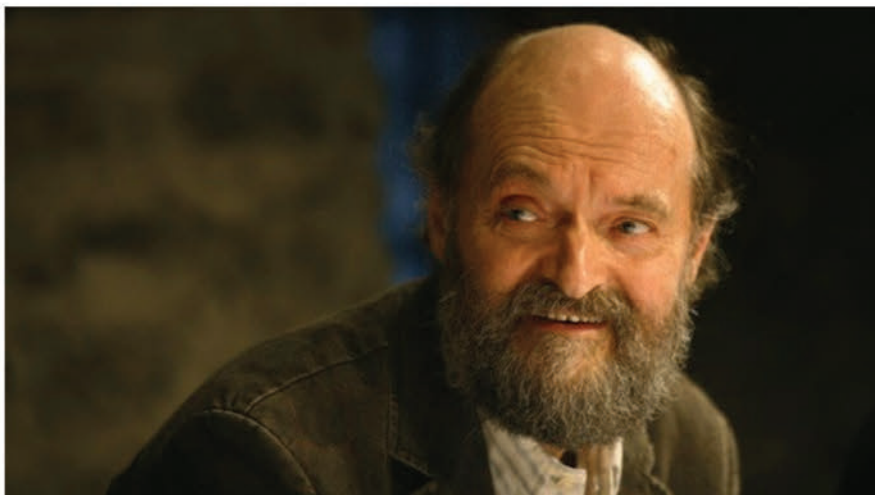
Soothing Music for Troubled Times

Pärt-ing Ways in the Garden of Eden

the answering voices in this Psalm 122 celebration of a temple pilgrimage. Echo effects, an oscillating decrescendo and a loftily sustained high note are like dramatic lighting effects illuminating the mighty chord clusters mounted by the chorus.

Another short work, the 2001 *Nunc dimittis*, opens with male voices, the low registers soon gently pierced by Ortoloni's soprano. Together they create a slowly rising tide of multivoiced chords, which finally erupts in an exultant outburst. Later, as if the waters were restabilizing, the men anchor a tonic chord.

High and low voices commune in the acapella *Magnificat* of 1989. The women, keyed by McKendree's soprano, billow out drifting clouds of labile harmonies. The men, emerge from underneath these celestial wanderings in a composition that feel at once capacious and tightly wrought.



Arvo Pärt | Credit: Peeter Langovits


Pärt's masterly *Stabat Mater* deploys 20 stanzas and orchestral interludes over a 25-minute running time. The work opens with a gorgeous string prelude of parallel descents. That lays the groundwork for first one and then a second intense vocal exclamation. The instruments and voices remain in vital conversation throughout, with melodic motifs recurring in new guises. The strings caper and keen. Tempos hasten as nowhere else on the recording. Vocal clusters build and dissolve. It all feels yoked to a driving purpose, at once fervent and consoling.

Not everything pays off so handsomely. Pärt can feel precious at times. *L'abbé Agathon* has its share of deliberate lumbering before its narrative invention takes hold. The story involves the desert dialogue of an abbot and a leper. The setting gradually takes on an operatic complexity, with recitative, arresting choral commentary, and shimmering string chords.


The performances throughout radiate conviction and urgency, a sense of belief in every phrase that's sung or played. While there's no shortage of Pärt recordings, initiates and novices to his will find an ample, wide-ranging, and rewarding selection of his absorbing music here.


Steven Winn is a San Francisco based free-lance writer and critic and frequent City Arts & Lectures interviewer. His work has appeared in *Art News*, *California*, *Humanities*, *Manhattan*, *Symphony Magazine* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*.


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Sonics (Stereo): ★★★★★

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MUSIC

Pärt: Stabat Mater - Gloriæ Dei Cantores



Gloriæ Dei Cantores GDCD 065

Stereo/Multichannel Hybrid

Classical - Vocal

Arvo Pärt:
Peace Upon You, Jerusalem
L'abbé Agathon
Salve Regina
Magnificat
Nunc dimitis
Stabat Mater

Gloriæ Dei Cantores
Richard K. Pugsley, conductor



Review by Mark Werlin - May 4, 2020 02:48 pm

In “Stabat Mater: Arvo Pärt”, a collection of sacred works for choir, organ and strings, vocal ensemble Gloriæ Dei Cantores weave a musical tapestry out of the inextricable strands of worldly and spiritual life.

The sacred music of Estonian composer Arvo Pärt found a worldwide audience through the 1984 ECM New Series release “Tabula Rasa”, which included his compositions “Fratres” and “Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten”. In CD format, Pärt’s music was in a sense secularized — given a commodity presentation with ECM’s distinctive black and white graphics — and placed in a context removed from the origins of sacred music, the Church. In this new SACD, Arvo Pärt’s music returns to that source.

The members of vocal ensemble Gloriæ Dei Cantores perform music not as a profession in the secular sense of the word, but as a religious vocation, with no less commitment than their professional counterparts. The ensemble’s concerts and recordings are distinguished by a devotional character that arises from their ongoing practice of choral services in the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts.

The church was designed along the lines of early Christian architecture, and is the home of the Gloriæ Dei Cantores ensemble. The singers participate in weekly and seasonal worship services, including evensong and liturgy of the hours in Gregorian chant. In preparation for this recording, each member committed to studying and reporting on Arvo Pärt’s compositional style, demonstrating a level of engagement well beyond that of most professional classical organizations.

Included in this disc are a range of compositions: Peace Upon You, Jerusalem (2002), Salve Regina and Nunc dimitis (2001), to the lengthy dramatic works, L'abbé Agathon (composed in 2004, revised in 2008 for two soloists, female choir and string orchestra) and Stabat Mater (composed in 1985, revised in 2008). Over the years, Pärt has revised some pieces many times, and inspired other artists to do their own arrangements; in my SACD collection are Kuniko's renditions for percussion (Cantus - KUNIKO), Jörgen van Rijen's for trombone and chamber orchestra (Fratres: Bach, Pärt - van Rijen) and the Berlage Saxophone Quartet's for saxophones and violin (In Search of Freedom: Weill / Shostakovich / Pärt / Schulhoff / Eisler - Berlage Saxophone Quartet).

The compositional style of Arvo Pärt has been labeled "tintinnabuli", a term which the composer tends to mystify:

"...I must search for unity. What is it, this one thing... Traces of this perfect thing appear in many guises – and everything that is unimportant falls away. Tintinnabulation is like this. . . . The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I call it tintinnabulation."

Conductor Paul Hillier, a champion of Pärt's music, characterizes the two voices of tintinnabuli style, which Pärt labels M-voice (melodic line) and T-voice (tintinnabuli line), as analogous to the condition of sin, and the redemptive experience of forgiveness. In the music, tintinnabuli style can be recognized in Pärt's frequent use of stepwise minor scale melodies (M-voice) in counterpoint to lines drawn from the triad and from the overtone series of cast bells (T-voice). But reducing Pärt's work to an ambiguous term and a rudimentary description of its workings fails to account for the range of effects produced within these self-imposed limitations. On first listening, the works can appear repetitious and harmonically static; but closer listening reveals the subtlety and complexity of his method.

In his Magnificat, Pärt's skillful use of chromatics, space and dynamics, elevates the work from mere "holy minimalism". There is a natural flow into his Nunc Dimitis, in keeping with the practice of singing the two works in the evensong services of the Anglican Church. The striking gruffness of the low notes for the male voices, in Pärt's system, corresponds to the "hum" tone of church bells; the low voices die away in the distance, like bell tones disappearing in the air.

"L'abbé Agathon", in this arrangement for soprano, baritone and string ensemble, was inspired by a tale about the Desert Fathers, monks who lived in the early centuries of the Christian era in the deserts of Egypt. The legend recounts a meeting between the hermit Agathon and a leper who tests Agathon's unconditional acceptance and charity toward the excluded Other. Only after these trials does the leper reveal himself as an angel sent by God.

The dramatic line is rendered vividly through the remarkable performance of soprano Rachel McKendree, who conveys the leper's disguise through shadings of vocal characterization suggestive of hardship and bitterness, only to reveal the angel's true identity in the climactic phrase "Béni es-tu, Agathon, par le Seigneur du ciel et de la terre" sung in her pure voice. It's an exhilarating musical gesture that signifies the sudden, awe-inspiring appearance of the divine messenger. The silence that follows, just preceding the ending passage, suggests that Agathon's true reward is not a brief glimpse of the celestial, but the enduring silence of God.

Pärt's setting of the 13th-century Stabat Mater is notable for the clarity of his part writing and the capacity of his simple melodic lines to convey abject suffering. Conductor Richard K. Pugsley elicits from the choir a wide range of emotional expression, from the anguished call to share in the pain of the dying son, to the soft hush of weeping in compassionate solidarity with the bereaved mother. Ritornello passages for the strings add further urgency, and propel the development towards an emotional climax at the phrase "Juxta crucem tecum stare, et me tibi sociare in plantu desiro", where the word "planctu" — lament — soars upwards on a rising crescendo, and falls to earth on the word "desidero", the depth of the lament.

The sumptuous and detailed DSD recording was engineered in DSD by Brad Michel and Dan Pfeiffer. Michel is known to vocal music SACD enthusiasts for his outstanding recordings Britten and Finzi Song Cycles - Mark Padmore and Barber: An American Romantic - Conspirare on the Harmonia Mundi label. Even in two-channel audio, there is a deep soundstage with the organ set at a distance from the choir and the string instruments distributed to their left and right, as they would be positioned in a semicircle in front of the singers.

For all lovers of contemporary sacred choral music, and as an alternative perspective on the music of Arvo Pärt, this recording is highly recommended.

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Performance: ★★★★★
Sonics (Stereo): ★★★★★



Review by Raymond Tuttle

PÄRT Stabat Mater. Peace Upon You, Jerusalem. L'abbé Agathon. Salve Regina. Magnificat. Nunc dimittis
• Richard K. Pugsley, cond; Gloriæ Dei Cantores • GLORIÆ DEI CANTORES 065 (SACD: 69:02 Text and Translation)

My first experience with the music of Arvo Pärt was an ECM New Series disc released in 1984 that contained *Tabula Rasa*, *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten*, and two versions of *Fratres*. I suspect that many readers acquired that same disc at about the same time. The performers on that disc include Gidon Kremer, Tatiana Grindenko, Keith Jarrett, and even Alfred Schnittke. That disc set my expectations for what Pärt's music is supposed to sound like, and for how it is supposed to be performed. The many ECM New Series releases that followed it built upon that foundation. Of course other labels and musicians have recorded Pärt's music, but the clear, austere, and coolly beautiful performances and sound quality established and continued by ECM have been widely accepted, and are hard to get out of your head—assuming that you would even want to.

This grave and beautiful new SACD from Massachusetts-based Gloriæ Dei Cantores blows an unexpectedly warm breeze on the Estonian composer's music. Granted, some of the works on this CD are less typical of the composer, and *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem* (composed in 2002 for the Estonian TV Girls' Choir) doesn't use the composer's signature *tintinnabuli* style. *L'abbé Agathon* (composed in 2004 and revised in 2008) is as close as Pärt has come to composing an operatic scena, as he brings to life the encounter between Abbot Agathon and a leper, who really is an angel of God come down to earth to test Agathon's charity. The *Salve Regina* from 2002, here performed in its original version for chorus and organ, also departs from the *tintinnabuli* technique, while retaining the composer's gift for quiet emotive power. These works expand our knowledge of who Pärt is as a composer, and they are performed with great polish—but also with a purity that feels uniquely unaffected—by Gloriæ Dei Cantores and by soloists from the choir.

The remaining three works are more characteristic of Pärt, and have been performed and recorded more frequently than the others. The lengthy (28-minute) *Stabat Mater*, which gives this disc its name, and which brings it to a close, is one of the composer's masterworks. Pärt specified that a string trio should accompany a trio of singers; here, the string parts have been doubled (cello) or tripled (violin and viola), and the full choral complement is used, but this does not bother me because the composer, who seems like a very practical man, himself prepared a version of this work for mixed chorus and orchestra. If you want to hear the original version, Paul Hillier's *Harmonia Mundi* disc (reviewed in *Fanfare* 36:2 by Lynn René Bailey) is superb, as is the one on ECM New Series's *Arbos* disc. Hearing Kristjan Järvi's Sony disc with the RIAS Kammerchor, however, is what really helps you to put a finger on what this new Gloriæ Dei Cantores disc is all about. There is a warmth here that one does not as readily hear in European recordings of these works. Indeed, the closing minutes of the *Stabat Mater* are heartbreaking on this new recording. Part of the reason, I think, is that the engineers have brought Gloriæ Dei Cantores into the foreground; the European recordings keep the singers further back, effectively objectifying them. However, one must admit that these new American versions simply are more emotional, without being any less musical.

I am sure it is no coincidence that this SACD has been released during Lent, although no one could have foreseen that it would be released during the novel coronavirus pandemic as well. In troubling and uncertain times, this is just what the doctor ordered, no matter what your spiritual beliefs might be.

Raymond Tuttle

Gloriae Dei Cantores Sings Pärt

Review by: David Vernier



Artistic Quality: 9

Sound Quality: 9

For the past several decades Arvo Pärt's music (and especially his choral works) has enjoyed a deep-rooted, enduring popularity around the world as substantial and sincere as any composer could hope for, and as such most of it has been very well served on multiple recordings, including most of the pieces on this program. Some of the works exist in different performing configurations, and you could spend hours (as I have) immersed in the catalog, comparing and contrasting the various versions on this or that recording. Or, you could just select a particular recording by first-rate performers, as we have here, irrespective of the provenance of each work, and just enjoy it on its own terms. Pärt is Pärt—the different versions are not “improvements”, just alternate options for different performing groups and situations.

Salve Regina, Stabat Mater, and L'abbé Agathon fall into this multiple-version category, and while the first two have received very fine previous recordings in the current configurations (mixed choir and organ; choir and string orchestra), the latter is a slightly different case. L'abbé Agathon for soprano and eight cellos was first performed in 2004 in Beauvais, France, by L'Octuor de violoncelles de Beauvais (who commissioned it) and soprano Barbara Hendricks. However, there are also versions for soprano, four violas, and four cellos (2005) and for soprano, alto or baritone, female choir, and string orchestra (2008),

which is the one we hear on this program. There is apparently only one other recording of this version, on ECM, which is available as a download (not a first choice for many listeners) and, for some reason, annoyingly inconvenient (and expensive) to obtain as a CD. Which makes this recording even more desirable, not only for its accessibility but for its excellent performance of this rarely heard work.

And speaking of these performers, Glorïae Dei Cantores and its director Richard Pugsley are not just another fine choir interested in presenting a program of Pärt's music. They went into this project with an extraordinary commitment to not only know the notes, but also to know the composer. As described on the choir's website (but for some reason not in the disc's liner notes): "Dedicated to promoting the best of sacred choral music, several years ago Glorïae Dei Cantores began an in depth study of Arvo Pärt. Immersing themselves in [his] compositional style, they sang his music in worship, on tour, and during an extensive concert series at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts.

"Each member of Glorïae Dei Cantores has presented in-depth study projects on Arvo Pärt's composition style and his musical approach to the vision and the text. Striving to present the true intention of the composer and to bring to life the music and vision as the composer himself would have liked to hear it portrayed, conductor Richard K. Pugsley coaches the choir to step aside and allow the music itself to bring forth a vision, and to communicate the soul and spirit of the sound."

And, not surprisingly, all of that translates into a recording of deeply felt performances that are always mindful of allowing the unadorned simplicity, the stark beauty and unpretentiousness of Pärt's music to flower. You can read in almost every commentary of Pärt's work about the details of his style and technique (if you're interested you can find some of this in our previous reviews), and you can do what you will with the many mostly futile attempts to explain how this unique composer does what he does in order for his music to claim this uniqueness (we've tried this too). But the proof is in the singing, and here you have it—in an exemplary "American" sound that contrasts distinctly with the Estonian, German, and British choirs who've also championed Pärt's music. If you're a choral music fan, you already have Pärt in your life; if you're new to his music, you can happily start here—or with any of the reference recordings.

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Recording Details:

Reference Recording: Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (ECM); Polyphony (Hyperion); Tallis Scholars (Gimell); Bavarian Radio Choir (Br Klassik); Hilliard Ensemble (ECM)

PÄRT, ARVO:

Peace Upon You, Jerusalem; L'abbé Agathon; Salve Regina; Magnificat; Nunc dimittis; Stabat Mater

Pugsley, Richard K. (conductor)

Glorïae Dei Cantores

Glorïae Dei Cantores - 065 CD



Stabat Mater

GLORIAE DEI CANTORES
RICHARD K. PUGSLEY
CONDUCTOR

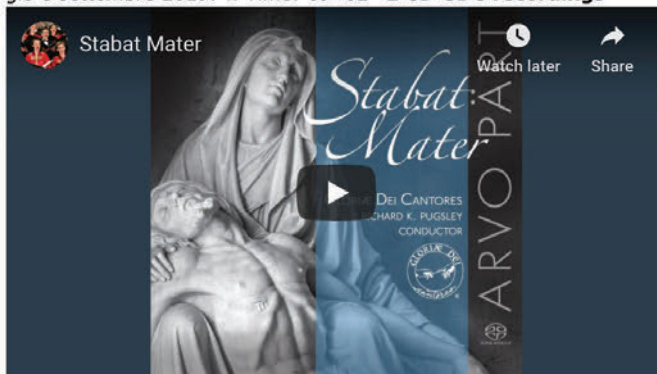


ARVO PÄRT

ARVO PÄRT (1935): "STABAT MATER" – GLORIAE DEI CANTORES

CD E DVD BY RICCARDO VIAGRANDE - 11 APRILE 2020

Peace upon you, Jerusalem; L'abbè Agathon; Salve Regina; Magnificat; Nunc dimittis; Stabat Mater. Gloriae Dei Cantores. Rachel McKendree, Amanda Ortolani (soprani), Alexander Pugsley (baritono), James E. Jordan (organo) Richard K. Pugsley (direttore). Registrazione: Chiesa della trasfigurazione, Orleans, settembre 2018, maggio e settembre 2019. T. Time: 69' 02" **1 CD GDC recordings**



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"The highest virtue of music, for me, lies outside of its pure sound. The particular timbre of an instrument is part of the music, but it is not the most important element. If it were, I would have surrendered to the essence of music. Music exists for itself ... two, three notes ... the essence must be there, independent of the instruments ...".



This statement by **Arvo Pärt** summarizes significantly the musical poetics of the Estonian composer who, through an original expressive and compositional research that has developed in various stages, characterized by adherence to totally different techniques and languages such as dodecaphony or Renaissance music or Gregorian chant, he came to the creation of a new style he called *Tintinnabuli*. After attending the Conservatory of Tallin, Pärt actually started composing in 1958, approaching the dodecaphony in the sixties which was a short parenthesis and which ended in the seventies when the composer closed in a form of voluntary silence to devote himself to the study of singing Gregorian and Renaissance music. In the same years the composer matured his conversion from Lutheranism to the Russian Orthodox church and in 1976 he applied for the first time in the composition *Für Alina* the new style he devised which he called *tintinnabulare* from the Latin *tintinnabulum* which means bell; it is based on two voices of which, a jingleit is characterized by the arpeggio of the triad, whose sounds are treated by the composer as if they evoked bells, while the second moves diatonically. This style, influenced by Pärt's mystical experiences and religious songs, is not only a musical expression, but also involves his vision of life and his attitude towards existence, as can be seen from what he himself stated:

"Tinkling is an area around which I sometimes wander when looking for answers - in my life, in my music, in my work. In my dark hours, I have the certainty that everything outside of this thing has no meaning. The complexity and the many facets alone confuse me and I have to look for unity: what is this thing and how do I find the way to reach it? The traces of this perfect thing appear in many forms and everything that is not important vanishes. Tinkling is like this ... The three notes of a triad are like bells and that's why I call it tinkling. "

Over the past twenty years, Pärt, which has become a reference figure on the world music scene, has won several awards such as the prestigious Ratzinger prize conferred in 2017.

Contemporary composer among the most performed worldwide, today Pärt is the protagonist of a CD published by the **GDC recordings** label in which his choral production is proposed starting from *Peace upon you, Jerusalem*, which, created for the female choir a chapel with the presence of two solo sopranos, is a testimony to the deep faith of the Estonian composer attentive to the expressive values of the text, consisting of an extract of Psalm 122 in the version of the New Jerusalem Bible. The text of the second song, *L'abbè Agathon*, which uses a staff consisting of violas, cellos, female choir, soprano and baritone, is instead taken from a legend, in which the eponymous protagonist, who went to the city to sell objects, is tested by a leper who turns out to be an angel and who asks him to use the proceeds from the sale of the objects to buy things from him. Musically it is a work of great charm in which the story is entrusted to the female choir, while a baritone and a soprano support the parts of the Abbè and the leper respectively. The deep religious sentiment of Pärt finds its most intense expression in the other passages of the CD: the *Salve Regina*, composed in 2001/2 on the occasion of the 1150th anniversary of the foundation of the Abbey of Essen; the suggestive *Magnificat*, which is configured as a perfect synthesis of tonal writing and tintinnabular technique; the *Nunc dimittis*, where Simeone's encounter with the Baby Jesus in the temple is commemorated, majestically created by Pärt with a triad of C sharp minor, and finally, the *Stabat Mater* which, composed for a choir of sopranos, contralto and tenors and an instrumental staff made up of violins, violas and cellos, commissioned by the Berg Foundation on the hundredth anniversary of the composer's birth, is a particularly intense work from an emotional point of view thanks also to the combination of particularly slow writing with the tinkling technique.

To perform these songs are the *Gloriae Dei Cantores*, a group founded in 1988 in Orleans, Massachusetts, which, under the direction of **Richard K. Pugsley**, interprets these works, with great technical mastery (homogeneity, attention to dynamics, phrasing), but above all with great involvement creating pure atmospheres of enchantment, which truly touch the heart and soul of the listener, transporting it to a high and profound spiritual dimension. In this high-level context, the technical-vocal qualities, the interpretative sensitivity of the soloists, from the luminous sopranos **Rachel McKendree** and **Amanda Ortolani**, to the beautiful baritone timbre of **Alexander Pugsley** stand out even more. Also in evidence is **James E. Jordan** on the organ.

ARTICOLI RECENTI

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
250 (1770 – 1827): "CONCERTO IN RE MAGGIORE PER VIOLINO E ORCHESTRA" (1806)

INTERVISTA ALLA VIOLINISTA LENA NEUDAUER

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
250 (1770-1827): "CONCERTO PER VIOLINO" (1806) E "ROMANZE"

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949): ORCHESTERLIEDER – SIEGFRIED JERUSALEM

ROSSINI: "FURORE E MAGIA" – PARTE 3



PÄRT *Peace upon You, Jerusalem*¹. *L'abbé Agathon*². *Salve Regina*³. *Magnificat*⁴. *Nunc dimittis*⁵. *Stabat Mater* • Richard K. Pugsley, cond; ^{1,2,4}Rachel McKendree, ⁵Amanda Ortolani (s); ²Alexander Pugsley (bar); ³James E. Jordan (org); Gloriæ Dei Cantores • GLORIÆ DEI CANTORES 063 (SACD: 69:54 📖)

The eventful life of composer Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) has been chronicled several times, most notably in a 1997 biography by one of his early proponents, Paul Hillier, but it bears summarizing again. It is a remarkable spiritual and musical journey, from his childhood explorations with a damaged family piano, to his musical education within the expectations of Soviet Realism in occupied Estonia, to his experiments in serialism that won both censure and prizes, and through his further run-ins with the Soviet occupiers because of his growing Orthodox religious convictions. All things eventually led to a profound personal and artistic crisis, years of public silence during a deeply reflective study of medieval and Renaissance music, and the eventual development, from that and other influences, of his now-familiar compositional voice. It is a voice that seems especially true to what we know of the profound, quiet intensity and inwardness of the man. Central to it is the conceptually simple compositional system he called *tintinnabuli*—*of bells*, in which a bell-like triadic harmony is placed in counterpoint to diatonic melodic ideas—by which he has constructed most of a large body of compelling, often otherworldly musical works, including many settings of religious texts.

Some of these works are now among the most performed of contemporary compositions. Hillier was, as many know, the first to record Pärt's choral music—there were a few orchestral recordings made for Melodiya before he was allowed to leave Estonia in 1980—and he and advocates like Tõnu Kaljuste, Stephen Layton, and others have created a performance tradition based on precision, purity of tone, and a certain emotional restraint. It has become what we expect to hear in this music, and the austere beauty is central to these recordings' popularity. It is therefore a bit of a surprise to hear a recording that documents a notably different approach: warmer in tone and more overtly expressive, while still precise, vivid, and exquisitely beautiful.

The new collection is the work of Richard K. Pugsley and the 30-voice Gloriæ Dei Cantores, the choir of the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts. Their text-centered approach to these works is characterized by him as “sung prayer,” and the resulting engagement of this choir of believers, members of a Benedictine community, is utterly captivating. The program he has chosen includes six works, both familiar and less familiar, culminating in one of the composer's undisputed masterpieces, the 1985 *Stabat Mater*. This major work, commissioned to honor Alban Berg on his centenary, is a miracle of intricacy, near-perfect symmetry, and profound simplicity. Pugsley's choir

reveals all this while emphasizing the spiritual core of the work: the “immeasurable pain of the event and potential consolation,” as Pärt described it. The original was written for three voices and a string trio. The composer created a version for orchestra and SAT chorus in 2008, which was premiered and recorded by Kristjan Järvi and RIAS forces (Sony). Pugsley bases his version on the original, but uses a small choir instead of the trio while expanding the string trio into an octet. He thereby keeps a chamber-music quality while assuring a better balance with the enlarged vocal forces. What he loses in the intimacy offered by solo voices he gains in the richness of the choral sound and the frisson of the ecstatic climax: arguably a best-of-both-worlds proposition.

Pugsley includes Pärt’s settings of two familiar canticles. The *Magnificat* (1989)—composed without the usual Gloria Patri—is another work from the early post-emigration period of Pärt’s career. The 2001 *Nunc dimittis*, composed for St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, completes the usual liturgical pair, even if they are not conceived as such. Both are *tintinnabuli* works, though the technique’s use in the later work is much freer. There are a number of excellent recordings of each, notably the tenderly sung versions led by Kaspars Putniņš (BIS), but these new ones are special. Again, one is amazed by how deeply felt the performances are. In the *Magnificat*, one can almost hear the quiver of anxious exaltation in the solo soprano’s voice. Lovely details abound: the caressing of the word “pace” in the *Nunc dimittis*, and the bass pedal points in its concluding Gloria Patri as a ground to the hocketing of the melody are but two. The Marian anthem *Salve Regina* (also 2001) is not a *tintinnabuli* work, though it shares an eloquent simplicity with those works. It does not use the traditional chant tune, but its chant-like melody is stirringly developed from unison into a shattering eight-part unresolved climax. The version recorded is the original for chorus and organ—there is a later one accompanied by celeste and strings—and organist James E. Jordan’s playing of the church’s lovely reclaimed E.M. Skinner is notable for its perfect understatement. He also provides the excellent program notes.

The program begins with two less familiar but fascinating works that show somewhat different facets of Pärt’s art. *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem* (2002) is a setting of Psalm 122 in a radiant folk-infused manner, written for the Estonian TV (ETV) Girl’s Choir. It is sung by the women of this chorus in a sunny tone that suggests these younger singers without ever becoming arch. *L’abbé Agathon* (2004/2008) is essentially a dramatic cantata, something unique in the Pärt canon. It was inspired by a legend about the fourth-century Egyptian hermit Agathon who meets a leper on the way to market, not knowing he is an angel in disguise. His sacrifices for the leper earn him the blessing of the heavenly being when the test is revealed. The original is for soprano and eight cellos, and I have a soft spot for the unabashedly operatic premiere recording of that version by Anna Maria Chiuri, a mezzo-soprano with the requisite high notes, and the Bologna Cello Project (Sheva). Pugsley has chosen the 2008 revision for two soloists—soprano and, in this case, baritone—female chorus, and string orchestra. A recording of this version has been released by Hillier (ECM), which, surprisingly, I find slightly disappointing. This new recording is superior, especially in the dramatic involvement of the soloists—both choir members—and the chorus.

Pugsley discusses the choir’s history and philosophy in the accompanying interview, but it is enough to say here that the excellence of the ensemble and its director is known worldwide thanks to

its numerous recordings and international tours. The engineering in stereo and surround is first-rate, though those familiar with this repertoire will note that the choral sound is more forward than is the norm for recordings of this composer's music. Some may prefer the more distanced perspective offered by ECM and others, with its greater blend and atmosphere, but the vivid presence of the singers is likely part of the impact these performances create, and the relative closeness more than once reveals details not heard in other recordings.

That said, I would never want to be rid of any of my collection of earlier recordings of this remarkable composer's work, built over the years. There is much remarkable music making there. Rather, this remarkable newcomer will simply take an honored place in it, as it should in yours.

Ronald E. Grames



How to Respond to Lawlessness
 Met. Luke of Zaporozhye and Melitopol
 Summing up, I like would to stress that you should always take an active position, especially in matters of paramount importance, which is exactly what the question of the

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ARVO PÄRT – STABAT MATER

A new and deeply moving expression of the Truth that sustains the Universe



Stabat Mater, the new CD recording of music by the composer Arvo Pärt, performed by the Choir and orchestral ensemble of Gloria Dei Cantores under the direction of Richard K. Pugsley, represents a new and fresh take on sacred music, and it also is a new level reached by the performing artists and the sound engineering team that recorded this disc.

Arvo Pärt has been steadily gaining prominence in the classical music world for many years. His work became known to me around 2011, when a colleague of mine, Dr Nicholas Reeves, worked with the Estonian composer on a concert series performed that year. Although I had yet to hear Pärt's compositions, the enthusiasm Dr Reeves expressed was very strong.

The world of Orthodox Christian composers and musicians is very small in the West. Few composers have been effective at transmitting the *ethos* of the Eastern Orthodox Church through the lens of Western classical and choral music. Most of us (for I compose as well), find ourselves hitting a wall when trying to bring these two worlds together, with the usual result for decades being rather hit-and-miss in terms of any sort of authentic Orthodox Christian *ethos* in Western sacred music.

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Arvo Pärt is one of the very few composers who has accomplished excellence and beauty in his approach. This CD, *Stabat Mater*, presents a stunning example of what happens when a deeply Orthodox worldview meets the heights of Western classical training and performance.

As a singer, composer and recording engineer that is deeply immersed in the Russian and Byzantine Orthodox Christian musical traditions, when I started to listen to the disc, I was challenged by something that was evocative of recent modern Western sacred works, but almost immediately the Orthodox ethos came through. That ethos is reflected in Pärt's compositional form of *Tintinnabuli*, which reflects something far different from the sentimentality of many great Western sacred works, but does something that is present in Orthodox Christian worship: It pushes the listener not into a memory of sacred events, but to "enter in" and be mystically present in those events, just as the Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services in the Orthodox Church also do. The form in which this happens is delightfully *different* from the techniques employed in the Slavic and Byzantine ethos, and while borrowing on Gregorian chant structure, Part's *Stabat Mater* does not merely meditate on the passion of Mary at the foot of her Son's Cross, *we become mystically present with her*.

All the selections on this disc are excellent. This is very serious music, not dark, not depressing, but possessing the serious, dead-on presentation that the Eastern Orthodox Church has always used in bringing us into the Divine reality of Christ's life, Passion, Death and Resurrection. To move beyond sentimental meditation into being present is a great gift, and Arvo Pärt gets us there in his work.

This is more evident when taken into account that the performers of Gloria Dei Cantores and Richard Pugsley approach this work steeped primarily in the Benedictine tradition of the Christian West. In listening to this disc, I cannot imagine a better interpretation of this music, both technically and spiritually, than what is presented here. A true meeting of East and West, neither side excluding the other, but standing *united* in the Truth of Christ. This is what happens on this disc.



Richard K. Pugsley

The recording is superb. Maestro Pugsley, Paul Tingley co-produced this record, and the recording engineers Brad Michel and Dan Pfeiffer did a superlative job bringing this recording to life. The presence of the choir and orchestra is intimate and spacious at the same time, with all nuances of voice and instrument flawlessly presented to the listener.

With some Grammy Award nominations and wins on projects I have worked on as an experiential basis, I enthusiastically and gratefully congratulate this team on an absolutely amazing work. I am very pleased that this recording is a part of my own collection.

More information about Stabat Mater, with a sample, can be found [here](#).

5/6/2020

Review by Colin Clarke

PÄRT *Peace upon You, Jerusalem*¹ . *L'abbé Agathon*² . *Salve Regina*³ . *Magnificat*⁴ . *Nunc dimittis*⁵ . *Stabat Mater* • Richard K. Pugsley, cond; ^{1,2,4} Rachel McKendree, ⁵ Amanda Ortolani (s); ² Alexander Pugsley (bar); ³ James E. Jordan (org); Gloriæ Dei Cantores • GLORIÆ DEI CANTORES 065 (SACD: 69:02 Ⓜ)

After a splendid disc of music by Leo Sowerby by Gloriæ Dei Cantores that I reviewed in *Fanfare* 42:4, expectations were high for this disc dedicated to the choral music of Arvo Pärt. It turns out that the music may be more familiar, but the standard of performance is just as high, and just as dedicated. The superb, close recording ensures one is constantly engaged.

The title of the disc is *Stabat Mater*, and it is with a setting of this that the program climaxes. But there is a succession of pieces leading up to it that are no less enthralling. The brief *Peace upon You, Jerusalem*, a setting of Psalm 122 scored for women's voices, is fresh as a daisy. It requires great skill and control to sing, particularly at those moments when the texture thins to just one voice, or when one voice peels away from another by a semitone.

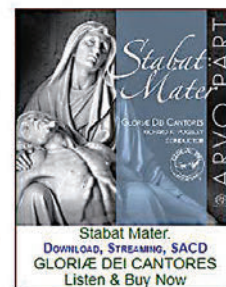
Scored for solo voices (soprano Rachel McKendree and baritone Alexander Pugsley), choir, and violas and cellos, *L'abbé Agathon* tells the story of one of the Desert Fathers (religious people who voluntarily entered into a life in the desert to understand the life of Christ) who meets a leper who is actually an angel in disguise. The work throughout sounds like Pärt and no one else; and yet it includes not only the string narrational quality, but more drama than one might perhaps associate with this composer. Soprano Rachel McKendree is particularly emotive in the work's later stages.

Although *L'abbé Agathon* uses strings, the present recording opts for the version of the *Salve Regina* for choir with organ. There's no missing the Gregorian chant-like nature of the opening choral melody, given in octaves. Harmonies can act as windows of light in this decidedly liturgical setting. This piece asks huge amounts of the participants: perfect pitching from the choir to ensure the clashes remain maximally expressive, and that the more radiant harmonic openings-out achieve the desired *Affekt*. James E. Jordan plays the glistening and ethereal organ part.

Moving over to the *Magnificat*, we find another approach. Pärt opts to concentrate on one pitch (C), creating an edifice based on the note and its overtones. If anything, the effect is even more meditative; come the *Nunc Dimittis* (presented as a separate piece), we move to a different flavor of stasis, modally based, out of which the solo soprano of Sister Amanda Ortoliani emerges, radiant and hopeful, leading to the choral luminosity of the final section.

Finally in the playing order comes the *Stabat Mater*. It could be argued Pergolesi set the bar here and no-one has ever topped him; could it be that the act of composing this in honor of the centenary of the death of Alban Berg enables Pärt to ascend to Pergolesian heights? Certainly the cumulative effect and the music's dolorous tailing off into Pärt's cherished silence is analogous in its power. Three-part choir meets three-part strings, the latter linking the sections of the texts with infectious dance rhythms (superbly realized here) as well as underpinning the choral singing unforgettably; equally unforgettable are the moments when the choir is heard *a cappella*, or when the upper voices demonstrate an almost supernatural sense of control.

There is plenty of competition here, not least from Paul Hillier and the Theatre of Voices on Harmonia Mundi (*Fanfare* 36:2; his disc also includes *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem*). But as a disc of purely Pärt, this presents 70 minutes of exquisite spiritual power. The presentation is fine too: The extended booklet notes are exemplary in guiding both the reader-listener through Pärt's stylistic traits and the individual works themselves. **Colin Clarke**



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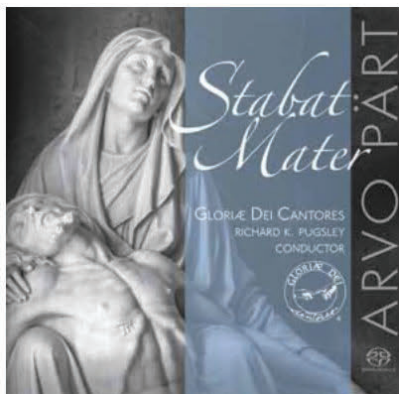
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ARVO PÄRT : STABAT
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CD événement critique. ARVO PÄRT : STABAT MATER (1 cd GDC – Gloriae Dei Cantores, Orléans 2018-2019)



CD critical event. ARVO PÄRT: STABAT MATER (1 cd GDC - Gloriae Dei Cantores, Orléans 2018-2019)

ARVO PÄRT: STABAT MATER (1 cd GDC - Gloriae Dei Cantores, Orléans 2018-2019). The Gloriae Dei Cantores Choir tackles several choral scores by the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (born in 1935). The cycle of 6 pieces composes a sort of anthology of some of the most touching and accessible sacred scores in Pärt. Sung by the American choir (based in Orleans, Massachussets) Gloriae Dei Cantores, the works gain immediate sincerity, embodied by a collective that expresses dynamics and momentum, aspirations, sense of the texts, fascinating contrasts, even spiritual elation.

In opening, **Peace upon You, Jerusalem** is a song of grace for Jerusalem, intoned with nuance by the women's choir. We can clearly see this radiant fervor of Pärt, woven with tears and joy, especially compassion.

The grave and painful resonance of **L'Abbé Agathon** (2004 - 2008, 15 min) is based on the powerful, sepulchral strings as soon as it opens; the sequence evokes the life and the hardships endured by Abbé Agathon, hermit of the 4th, on a walking rhythm where the female choir and the baritone voice dialogue (text in French); the journey, drawing a spiritual path, reaches a higher metaphorical level, while acting dramatically in the manner of a mini oratorio. The soprano who leaves the choir, embodying the leper (the disguised angel) pierces the sound tissue as an appearance / revelation, - the agent of the drama and the final revelation; it expresses the miraculous nature of the episode, thus emphasizing its most expressive outcome ... the female choir evokes each major episode in the life of the old man thus tested: Agathon crosses the path of the leper, takes him to the city, buys him a cake, and as many objects as he wishes, then takes him back where they had met. Music also destitute and of a great poetic force proportionally allusive as the writing settles (staccato of the strings, no winds nor wood ...); hope is realized in the encounter with the other, in what we give him, in what he allows us to know in this sincere exchange. Agathon became rich by stripping off for the leper. The score is thought of as an essential mini-drama, and a particularly successful program.

The **Salve Regina** (more than 11 minutes) is for the mixed choir, collected, inscribed very high in the spheres (as indicated by the continuous song of the organ in the background). The tone of fervor that unfolds there is that of confident, assumed serenity. The piece was written for the Essen Cathedral (1500 years of the founding of the Essen Abbey, 2002) and follows a harmonic journey of rare subtlety sung by the four parts of the choir which seem to dialogue with each other, here too, marking the stages of a spiritual journey where the collective experience of sharing is the most manifest gift.

Magnificat (1989): the choir collects the emotion that overwhelms Marie at the Announcement of her future motherhood; she is the chosen one of God, the most admirable of all women. The a cappella voices are alongside the Virgin, compassionate and tender, powerful and conquering at the same time. It is a force which arises and submerges, born of mystery, which disappears ("Magnificat anima mea Dominus") as one closes a book of Wonders.

The score of **Nunc Dimitis**, dated 2001, is the most planar, choral expression of Simeon's prayer: "space, place, silence" ... Pärt concentrates all the elements of an acute consciousness, the vision that a Simeon du Temple, in a slow intensification of the vocal line supported by the whole choir, from ultra treble to the most sepulchral bass. Pärt broadens the sound spectrum as a surveyor with unwavering and growing faith; as inextinguishable.

The Stabat Mater is the masterpiece of the program; she witnesses the listener in dark and bitter waves, of total affliction - expression of the most absolute destitution (waves descending by the strings alone) where modesty and light expression weigh with all their weight; the choir, the instrumentalists know how to make the powerful prayer spring from it, true lamentation for the grieving Mother facing the sacrificed Son, tortured on the cross. The 25-minute score (shorter here than some other versions) reconciles both intimate inner fervor and more dramatic expressiveness, with this color of affliction not really accepted thanks to the vibration of the strings. Thus music operates what it specifically knows how to achieve: a progressive extension of the temporal and sound spectrum which says the infinity of suffering; and at the same time, a direct and sincere metamorphosis, from deep sadness to the joy of Redemption. From darkness to Light. Arvo Pärt, an enlightened passer, writes step by step, measure after measure, this progressive, inevitable transfiguration, which contains the Christ message in the promise of Salvation. Not all sacrifice is in vain, it seems to tell us. Because it always leads closer to the Light. Thus the final which is accomplished in an increasing murmur, like a last dazzling (sharp strings), expression of an intangible summit, of full consciousness.



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Faithful to his convictions and his musical culture, Pärt synthesizes here orthodox music, Renaissance song, expressionism of the "Tintinnabuli" style where grasp the importance of silence, clarity, balance, consonance. Familiar with Pärt's choral writing, including singing and presenting it on tour, among others in Orléans, Massachusset, the singers of the Glorïae Dei Cantores ensemble frankly display the fervor that carries the whole choral structure. The **Stabat Mater** touches and captivates with its direct expressiveness, its grace which is accomplished step by step, especially in the last bars. It seems to act in circles and spirals ... like a continuous reiteration. Commissioned by The Alban Berg Foundation (centenary of the birth of Berg, 2010), the score opposes an impossible and yet structural confrontation, pain and consolation.

Pärt brings out the incandescence of the illumination of shadow and silence with sharp clarity (character of the "Tintinnabuli" style, after the bell of the medieval portable organ, as his emblematic works also attest. such, Cantus, in memory of Benjamin Britten, Fratres, Tabula Rasa, When Bach Bienen gezüchtet hätte, Pari Intervallo, Arbos,...). Simple, subtle, accessible, pure, the music gradually springs from the depths, ... hence this exceptional density which gives what could sound light and hovering, an underground sincerity which is the hallmark of intimate spiritual experience. Over time, as more anchored in an assumed and luminous fervor, Pärt develops his writing for the sacred and the voices, especially choirs. It is a perpetual questioning, an inexhaustible and always tense faith that never ceases to challenge. The performers of this program offer a true, invested, and often astounding interpretation.



CD événement, critique. ARVO PÄRT : Choral works (Stabat Mater, L'Abbé Agathon, Nunc Dimitis...) Glorïae Dei Cantores / Richard K. Pugsley, direction (1 cd **DGC records**, 2018 – 2019).

- 1 – Peace upon You, Jerusalem
- 2 – L'abbé Agathon
- 3 – Salve Regina
- 4 – Magnificat
- 5 – Nunc dimitis
- 6 – Stabat Mater

Durée totale : 1h09mn

HYBRID SACD RELEASE

RECORDING ENGINEERS: Brad Michel, Dan Pfeiffer

RECORDED: September 2018, May & September 2019

at The Church of the Transfiguration, Orleans

MA UPC: 709887006524

USA & Canada: CD65

Naxos Global Logistics: PARCD65

Retail price: \$19.99

Visiter le site de l'ensemble Glorïae dei Cantores : <https://gdcrecordings.com/>


Posté le 21.05.2020 par **Hugo Papbst**

Mot clés: **Agathon, Arvo Pärt, Glorïae Dei Cantores, Magnificat, Nunc Dimitis, Richard K. Pugsley, Salve Regina, Simeon, Stabat Mater.**

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Review by Daniel Morrison

PÄRT *Peace upon You, Jerusalem*¹ . *L'abbé Agathon*² . *Salve Regina*³ . *Magnificat*⁴ . *Nunc dimittis*⁵ . *Stabat Mater* • Richard K. Pugsley, cond; ^{1,2,4} Rachel McKendree, ⁵ Amanda Ortolani (s); ² Alexander Pugsley (bar); ³ James E. Jordan (org); Gloriæ Dei Cantores • GLORIÆ DEI CANTORES 065 (SACD: 69:02 )

I previously encountered the Massachusetts-based choral ensemble Gloriæ Dei Cantores in its recording of Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil*, reviewed by me and others in 40:6 and included on my 2017 Want List. Its rendition of that work was distinguished by an unearthly serenity, an intensely devotional feeling, and a sense of deep exaltation, qualities that I attributed to the performers' profound belief in the religious content of the work. The performances of works by the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt on this disc leave a similar impression, as well as being technically excellent. Although Pärt, as was Rachmaninoff, is an adherent of the Russian Orthodox church, having converted from Lutheranism, and although his style sometimes displays the influence of Orthodox liturgical music, four of the six pieces on this disc are written to familiar Latin texts that relate to Roman Catholicism rather than Eastern Orthodoxy. The outliers are an English-language setting of Psalm 122 and a French-language parable about an early Christian figure. All of the works have a religious message, but one does not have to be religious, as I am not, to respond to their eloquence and depth of feeling, which are usually achieved with simple techniques and limited means. One of these techniques, invented by Pärt and labeled *tintinnabuli*, is hard to define but involves a bell-like sound and a particular way of manipulating a triad.



Stabat Mater.
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The setting of Psalm 122, *Peace upon You, Jerusalem*, uses a version of the text drawn from the *New Jerusalem Bible* and is for a women's chorus *a cappella* with two soprano soloists. The five-minute piece, composed in 2002, begins joyfully and later becomes serenely contemplative. The text exalts the status of Jerusalem as the focus of the faith, the location of the "house of Yahweh our God," and prays for its peace and prosperity. Pärt underlines the importance of the city by having the chorus intone its name repeatedly in lines two and three of the text, drawing it out lovingly, with varying melody.

The French text of *L'abbé Agathon* belongs to the genre of tales in which the protagonist is offered the opportunity to perform charitable acts benefiting an unappealing figure who turns out to be an emissary of the higher powers, and who then rewards him for his good works. In this case Agathon, one of the early Christian "Desert Fathers," encounters a leper while on his way to market to sell some goods. The leper makes various requests, to all of which the good Agathon accedes. At the end, the leper is transformed into an angel, who confers on Agathon the blessing of "le Seigneur du ciel et de la terre" (the Lord of heaven and earth). Pärt's setting, completed in 2008, is for soprano and baritone soloists, women's chorus, and five-part string ensemble. The chorus narrates the tale, while the soloists sing the lines allotted to the leper/angel and Agathon respectively. The string ensemble provides darkly colored, mildly dissonant textures that contribute to the sense of legendary mystery that pervades the piece and also sometimes depicts the action, such as the trudging of the heavily laden Agathon on his

way to market. The choral part, although grave and beautiful, is simple and largely monophonic, and in a way the strings have the most active role. They begin and end the piece by themselves and in between have many interludes where they alone are performing. Their playing is excellent, as is the choral singing. The baritone soloist, Alexander Pugsley, has little to do, as Agathon's interjections are mostly monosyllabic. Soprano Rachel McKendree acts her part effectively, adopting a deliberately irritating, wheedling tone for the leper's demands, which vanishes when she is transformed from leper to angel.

Interesting as the above two pieces are, for me it is the Latin settings that contain the most compelling music and the most quintessential Pärt. These works are captivatingly beautiful, profoundly spiritual and devotional, and evocative of otherworldly mysteries, with constantly evolving textures and subtle harmonic color. And it is here that the special quality of *Gloriæ Dei Cantores*, its depth of devotion and commitment to the content of the works performed, is displayed to the fullest extent. *Salve Regina* was written in 2001–02 for the 1150th anniversary of the cathedral in Essen, Germany. The text is an appeal to the Virgin Mary for aid in confronting the tribulations of earthly life, and although it is believed to date from the 11th century, the style of Pärt's music, as the notes point out, has more in common with the 16th century. The piece is performed here by a mixed chorus with organ accompaniment, although remarks by Pärt quoted in the notes indicate that he wrote it to be performed by four separate choirs—children's, women's, men's, and mixed—deployed in different parts of the cathedral. Such pronounced antiphonal effects are not heard here, at least not in stereo, and I do not have the equipment to evaluate multi-channel sound. The music is mostly quiet and contemplative but reaches impassioned climaxes, with a greater complexity of choral texture, at the points where the text pleads for the Virgin to turn her “eyes of mercy toward us” and “after this our exile to show us Jesus.”

The *Magnificat* (1989) and *Nunc dimittis* (2001) are both scored for mixed chorus *a cappella* with a single soprano soloist, but as in the case of *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem*, the soloists, although clearly audible, are integrated with the chorus and do not stand out prominently in an operatic manner. In the text of the *Magnificat*, Mary praises the Lord for the extraordinary honor he has bestowed upon her and for his justice and mercy. Pärt's setting is said to derive from a single pitch and its overtones, and with these limited means the composer manages to generate extraordinary amount of variety. Rather than being exultant and celebratory in the manner of many settings of this text, Pärt's version is awe-struck, transcendental, and deeply mysterious in tone. The text of *Nunc dimittis* (Now thou dost dismiss) is drawn from the Gospel of St. Luke and represents the words of Simeon, who has been promised that he will not die until he has seen the Messiah, when he enters the temple in Jerusalem and takes the infant Jesus in his arms. Pärt's setting employs a technique called hocketing, used in medieval and Renaissance music, which involves passing the melodic line back and forth among different voices. The choral texture here is especially rich in timbral and harmonic color.

The *Stabat Mater* is both the earliest and at 25 minutes by far the largest in scale of the works on this disc. It was composed on commission for the centenary of the birth of Alban Berg in 1985. This 13th-century poem about Mary's unbearable grief in witnessing the crucifixion and death of Jesus has been set by countless composers over the centuries, but Pärt's setting for three-part chorus (soprano, alto, and tenor) and three-part strings (violin, viola, and cello) is distinctive and remarkable. The opening of the work is striking—the strings intone a mournful sighing motif until the chorus enters with an outburst of lamentation on the word “Amen,” using the same motif, before gradually relapsing into quiet sighing. The 20 stanzas of the poem are set mostly without repetition of the words. The settings can be meditative or assertive but are pervaded by a sense of deep anguish. Groupings of the stanzas are separated by dance-like interludes for strings alone, and there are other, briefer string interludes between some stanzas. Some of the stanzas in the early part of the piece use a technique similar to hocketing, where one or more of the voices maintain the line while another joins in intermittently. At

the end the strings and chorus return to the sighing motif, on the word “Amen,” in a prolonged and entrancing evocation of peace and eternity.

The SACD stereo sound of this release is excellent. Although it was recorded in a church, reverberation is not excessive, prominent enough to confer an appropriate glow to the sound but with no blurring. The choral textures are clear and detailed, with precise definition of the different choral groupings. Switching to the conventional CD layer yields a soundstage that is less wide and deep and a reduction in textural detail, timbral definition, and bass presence. The sumptuous booklet includes the texts in the original language and English translation.

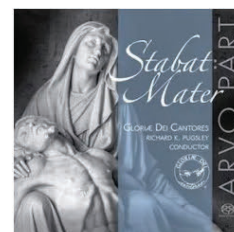
This release contains extraordinary, profoundly moving music, superbly performed, and is recommended to all lovers of choral music. **Daniel Morrison**

Arvo Pärt — Stabat Mater – Richard K. Pugsley – Gloriae Dei Cantores

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**PÄRT: Stabat Mater; Peace Be Upon You, Jerusalem;
L'abbe Agathon; Salve Regina; Magnificat; Nunc
dimittis – Gloriae Dei Cantores/ Richard K. Pugsley –
Gloriae Dei Cantores multichannel SACD GDCD 065,
69:02 *****:**



The late Arvo Pärt is a remarkable musician; a convert to Eastern Orthodoxy from Lutheranism, he forged ahead with an uncanny ability to immerse himself in the spiritual ethos of his newly adopted faith, so far removed from the Protestant philosophy. Much—perhaps most—of his religious or “liturgical” music do not fit easily into true liturgical settings but are rather explorations of his own personal devotion using ancient, tried and true forms as the vehicle for his expression. This is nothing new—one rarely hears Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* performed in church!

But there are some works that neatly fit the churchly rubric. *Stabat Mater* is one of them. Even though it is not part of the Eastern Orthodox church services—the *Lamentations* of the Mother of God before the tomb of Christ on Holy Friday evening are perhaps the closest parallel—it has long been an accepted hymn in the Roman Catholic Church. It was in fact suppressed, along with many other “sequences”, by the Council of Trent, but Pope Benedict XIII brought it back for the celebration of Our Lady of Sorrows in 1727. The popularity of the hymn has never wavered, with numerous composers engaging it over the years. Pärt has given it an exquisite treatment, and the version used here is fortunately the 2008 revision first recorded by the RIAS Chamber Choir and Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra under Kristjan Jarvi, released in 2010. In fact, it has been ten years since I reviewed that release. Originally for string trio and three solo singers, the upgraded version for choir and orchestra is far superior, adding depth and warmth that was previously, if not missing, certainly constrained. Plus, it can fit nicely into the liturgical constructs of an actual church service, if needed.

This cannot be said of *L'abbe Agathon*. Falsely accused as being simply a “legend”, the tale is well-known and attested as an incident in the lives of one of the Desert Fathers of the Christian Church. These lives are full of wisdom and practical, easily understood examples of the simplicity of Christian life. Pärt treats it as an energetic and important parable, setting to music that which can often devolve into saccharine and childish imagery in

lesser hands. With its wonderful string ensemble and women's chorus, this piece reminds me a bit of Britten's church parables.

Peace Be Upon You, Jerusalem, is one of the "Songs of Ascent" found in the psalter, or Book of Psalms, in this case Psalm 22. It is a joyful and uplifting work for female voices. *Salve Regina* is another Roman Catholic setting, this time in its original setting for choir and organ (in 2011, Pärt reset the work for choir, celesta and string orchestra a celebration of 150 years of Italian unity). "Hail, O Queen", devised by an 11th century German monk, had an initial tune associated with it, but Pärt uses his own in miraculous fashion, culminating in an eight-part climax in several places in the text.

Magnificat is of course as old as the hills, the song of the Mother of God in response to her conversation with Elizabeth, her cousin and the mother of John the Baptist. Pärt's example stems from a single note, but the things he draws from this initial leitmotif are extraordinary! Liturgically this work is found in vespers in the Roman Catholic Church, and in Matins in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and possibly the most "set" of any liturgical text in history.

Finally, the *Nunc dimittis* ("Lord now lettest now thy servant depart in peace") pronounced by Simeon the Righteous as he beheld the child Jesus in his hands, is given exploration as the culmination of the long, anticipatory, and righteous life of one whose patience and willingness ultimately paid off. We hear almost palpably the resignation of the old man's final surrender into the hands of the one he waited for. Pärt is celebratory and reverent in the portrayal of this sublime incident.

Gloriae Dei Cantores has rarely sounded better than here. Intonation is spot on, emotional fervency at a high level, and the Super Audio recording captures them in all their magnificent fullness. There are few choral groups that not only perform, but *believe* in the texts they are singing, and this commitment to the spirit and the word enhances the communicative ability in a manner than most similar ensembles can only envy. A fantastic recording.

—Steven Ritter

STABAT MATER • Gloria Dei Cantores; James E. Jordan (org); cond. Richard K. Pugsley •

GLORIA DEI GDCD 065 (69:02)

PÄRT Peace upon You, Jerusalem. L'abbé Agathon. Salve Regina. Magnificat. Nunc Dimittis. Stabat Mater.

Today's most performed living composer of religious music, Estonian-born Arvo Pärt's music can be heard in churches world wide. *Peace upon You, Jerusalem* is a setting of *Psalms 122* expressing love for the city and the word that represents it. Pärt's alternation of major and minor keys reminds the listener that the words were often heard at ancient synagogue services. The work culminates in a more modern legato and its loving pianissimo pleads for peace among all communities living in the area. *L'abbé Agathon* is thought to have been a third century CE Christian monk who lived in the Egyptian desert. According to an old story, Abbot Agathon cared lovingly for an unkempt, unmannered leper. Later, the diseased man revealed himself to be an angel sent by God to test the Abbot. Pärt's setting of the story, features soprano and baritone with a women's chorus. When the leper's true nature is revealed, tremolo strings evolve into strong sustained pitches that tell of the monk looking up and blessings descending upon him as the angel ascends into Heaven. The chorus sings this charming light piece with sensitivity and it clears the air before the program's heavier works. The *Salve Regina* is a prayer many Roman Catholic children learn in their Religious Education Class. The praying supplicant greets and praises Mary, the mother of Jesus, and then asks her to hear the prayers of her earthly "children" and bring them to be with God in Heaven at the end of their exile on this planet. Since Pärt composed this piece for 1150th anniversary of a 9th century abbey in Essen Germany, he incorporated stylistic elements of traditional monastic music. The Cantatores bring it to life in an exquisite rendition.

The words of the *Magnificat* are said to be the Virgin Mary's answer to having been selected to be the mother of the Messiah. In it, Mary realizes the honor God has bestowed upon her. She acknowledges the fact that generations of religious people will call her "blessed." Pärt uses tonal color and copious overtones to show the diverse elements of one pitch, C, before bringing his piece to a close with a restatement of the opening, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Nunc dimittis servum Tuum, (Now You dismiss Your servant in peace), Simeon's prayer celebrates the end of his work on earth and his delight in the promised reward. Through music, Pärt invites us to visualize the elderly Simeon, a frail man in a huge, colorfully furnished temple hung with rich fabrics embellished with the symbols of Israel. The work ends with a glorification of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The name of the recording is Stabat Mater (The Mother Stood) and it is the final piece on the disc. The music creates a picture of the grieving mother standing beside her Son as he hangs on the cross. Commissioned by the Alban Berg Foundation on the 100th anniversary of Berg's death, Pärt fulfilled it with music inspired by a 13th century chant. Thus, the composition becomes a modern meditation on the crucifixion and the bereavement of Jesus's mother. Pärt employs a three-part chorus along with violins, violas, and cellos to illustrate the depth of Mary's sorrow and the high price Jesus paid for our salvation. As this picture becomes real in the minds of the listening supplicants through meditation, they mentally stand with Mary at the foot of the cross and hope someday to join her in paradise. The emotional punch of the group's singing is monumental here. The Gloria Dei Cantatores is a group from the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts. They are part of an ecumenical monastic community in the Benedictine tradition which sings worship services in Gregorian chant. The Cantatores have sung all over the world and have made numerous fine recordings. This is an exquisite rendition of Arvo Pärt's compositions, both for musicality and for well balanced sound. I think anyone who is seriously interested in Liturgical music should own this disc.

—Maria Nockin 5 stars This is music for serious meditation.



A new Arvo Pärt album climbs to number five in the Billboard classical chart

By Silver Tambur / May 21, 2020 / 0 Comments / Culture

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A new album of the choral works of the Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt, "Stabat Mater: Choral Works by Arvo Pärt", released by the US-based choir, Gloriæ Dei Cantores, has made it to the top five in the United States Billboard classical chart.


The latest album featuring the choral works Pärt is climbing up the classical chart of Billboard, the music industry standard record chart in the United States. "Stabat Mater: Choral Works by Arvo Pärt" debuted at number 15 in the chart but has now made it to the top five in one of the largest classical music markets of the world.


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Arvo Part: Stabat Mater
Gloriæ Dei Cantores / Richard K. Pugsley
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Immersing in Pärt's compositional style

The album was recorded and released by Gloriæ Dei Cantores (Latin for "Singers to the Glory of God"), a 40-voice choir based in Orleans, Massachusetts, under the direction of the choir's artistic director and principal conductor, Richard K. Pugsley. "The recording offers a unique cross-section of Pärt's choral works, revealing the heart, soul and mind of a true master of his language in both text and music," a representative of the choir told Estonian World, adding that the choir was "dedicated to promoting the best of sacred choral music".



"Several years ago, we began an in-depth study of Arvo Pärt, immersing ourselves in his compositional style. We sang his music in worship, on tour and in an extensive concert series at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, MA," the representative said. "Our repertoire includes Pärt's larger works such as Passio and Stabat Mater as well as the lesser known and performed L'abbé Agathon and Berliner Mass."

"In this recording, the expressive beauty and clarity of Pärt's music shines through the joyful dance-like rhythms of Peace Upon You, Jerusalem and the glorious setting of Mary's words in the Magnificat," a representative of the choir explained. "The masterful L'abbé Agathon sets the scene of this ancient fourth century story of the chance (or was it?) meeting of the hermit Agathon and a leper. The final work – a musical landmark in Pärt's career – is Stabat Mater, written to express the passion, agony, and love of Mary at the foot of the cross of her son."



Positive reviews

The album has already earned many positive reviews in the US. The San Francisco Classical Voice said that "Arvo Pärt's spiritual imagination infuses an exciting disc from Gloriæ Dei Cantores" and "the performances throughout radiate conviction and urgency, a sense of belief in every phrase".

"Gloriæ Dei Cantores" was founded in 1988 and sings in 18 languages. The choir has toured in 23 countries in Europe, Asia and North America.

Arvo Pärt, born in Paide, Estonia, in 1935, was the world's [second most performed living composer](#) in 2019, according to the classical music event database, Bachtrack.

Cover: Gloriæ Dei Cantores. Images by Gloriæ Dei Cantores.



Arvo Pärt: L'abbé Agathon + Magnificat + Nunc dimittis, Peace Upon You! Jerusalem + Salve Regina + Stabat Mater; Rachel McKendree, Sr. Amanda Ortolani, Sopran, Alexander Pugsley, Bariton, James E. Jordan, Orgel, Chor und Orchester Glorïae Dei Cantores, Richard K. Pugsley; 1 SACD Glorïae Dei Cantores GDCD065; Aufnahme 09/2018, Veröffentlichung 01/05/2020 (69'02) – Rezension von Uwe Krusch



Obwohl kein Freund großer Worte und damit nicht mediengewandt, hat Arvo Pärt doch einen sehr exponierten Platz als Komponist ernster Musik erhalten. Das mag darin begründet sein, dass seine Werke immer von tiefen Gefühlen getragen werden. Verschiedene Chorwerke, teilweise mit solistischen Stimmen oder auch von Streichern oder Orgel begleitet, zeigen seine intensiv religiöse Stimme unter den zeitgenössischen Komponisten.

Die Sänger und Musiker von Glorïae Dei Cantores entwickeln den sich meist in ruhigen Bahnen strömenden Fluss der Musik mit Gestaltungsfeingefühl. Im Umfeld meist nur intellektuell sinnfreier

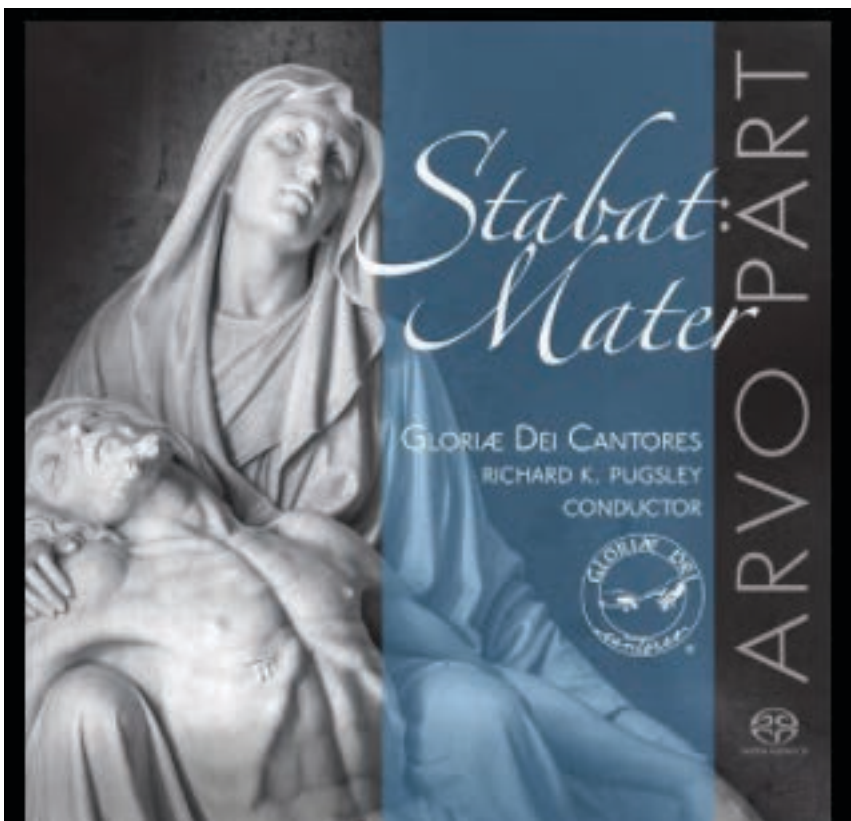
politischer Sabberlei tut es gut, auch einmal US-amerikanische Stimmen zu hören, die sich einer angemessenen Sinnvermittlung verschrieben haben und dazu adäquate Methoden einsetzen. So wird deutlich, dass die Botschaft der Musik von Arvo Pärt auch außerhalb des Umfeldes seiner estnischen Herkunft eine universelle Botschaft vermittelt.

Die Solisten ergänzen den Ansatz der Ensembles mit heraus-, aber nicht abgehobenen Beiträgen. Zusammen mit der keine Wünsche offen lassenden technischen Zubereitung gibt die im ensembleeigenen Label herausgebrachte Aufnahme einen gelungenen Eindruck dieser Chorwerke.

Arvo Pärt is one of the best-known composers of serious music. This may be due to the fact that his works always carry deep feelings. On this CD various choral works, some with solo voices or accompanied by strings or organ, show this intense, religious voice among contemporary composers.

The singers and musicians of Glorïae Dei Cantores develop the flow of the music with a sense of creative sensitivity. In an environment of political gibberish that is usually intellectually meaningless, it is good to hear voices from the US that are committed to conveying meaning and that use appropriate methods to do so. Thus it becomes clear that Arvo Pärt's music conveys a universal message.

The soloists are totally convincing with contributions that stand out but are not detached. With a technical preparation that leaves nothing to be desired, the recording, released on the ensemble's own label, gives a successful impression of these choral works.



Gloriae Dei Cantores / Richard K. Pugsley
Arvo Pärt: Stabat Mater

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AllMusic Rating



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AllMusic Review by James Manheim [-]

The choir [Gloriae dei Cantores](#) and its director, [Richard K. Pugsley](#), have emerged as prominent American champions of [Arvo Pärt](#)'s music, with a distinctive sound to match. This recording, featuring [Pärt](#)'s choral arrangement of his own substantial Stabat Mater, is especially recommended to those outside North America, who may not have encountered approaches to [Pärt](#) beyond those of technically flawless Baltic choirs or ethereal British all-male cathedral groups. Here, richness of tone is prioritized over blend and the listener can hear individual voices in the 40-member choir. It brings a fresh feel to [Pärt](#), more passionate and intimate than usual, and less abstractly "minimalist." Beyond this, the program recommends this album to listeners, for it gives the lie to the myth of an essential homogeneity in [Pärt](#)'s production. There is a mysterious evocation of chant in the Salve Regina, declamatory and narrative structure in L'abbé Agathon, compact and motet-like structures in the opening English-language Peace upon You, Jerusalem, and the Nunc dimittis (not part of a pair with the preceding Magnificat), and the verse-determined shape of the Stabat Mater, one of [Pärt](#)'s major works. It adds up to a fresh, satisfying [Pärt](#) collection, once again beautifully recorded far from the centers of sound engineering wizardry at the choir's home base, the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, MA. **9 out of 10 Stars**

CLASSICAL CD REVIEWS



PART: Stabat Mater - Choral Works

Soloists/Gloriae Del Cantores / Richard K Pugsley, cond.

GDC RECORDINGS 065. TT: 69:02

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This site has mentioned a number of recordings of choral music of Arvo Pärt, in particular one directed by Paul Hillier (REVIEW). Now we have this fine new release that features the 25-minute Stabat Mater. The program also includes Peace Upon You, Jerusalem, a setting of Psalm 122 for women's voices, L'abbé Agathon, a musical re-telling of an ancient the elderly Abbot Agathon, Salve Regina, and Nunc dimittis, and Magnificat. Profuse program notes describe the work, and complete texts and translations are provided. The first-class Gloriae Dei Cantores, a 30-member ensemble gives dedicated performances with a small instrumental ensemble. The recordings were made in Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Mass. Engineers have captured the performances in outstanding multi-channel audio placing the listener right inside the resonant church.

CD HotList

New Releases for Libraries



Arvo Pärt

[Stabat Mater: Choral Works by Arvo Pärt](#)

Gloriae Dei Cantores / Richard K. Pugsley

Paraclete (dist. Naxos)

GDCD 065

Arvo Pärt grew up in Estonia, during a time when it was one of the most brutally repressive of the Soviet Bloc countries. Over time his religious devotion (and the overtly religious content of his music) got him into trouble with the authorities, and he was finally able to leave the country in 1980—and thereafter became the world's most frequently performed living composer. These two discs offer programs centered on one of his most monumental works: the *Stabat Mater* setting. Originally written for three voices with string trio, both Gloriae Dei Cantores and the Choir of Clare College perform the composer's later arrangement of the work for choir and string orchestra. Contrasting the style of the two ensembles when performing this work (and the others on the two discs) is interesting: Gloria Dei Cantores have a more fullsome, 20th-century sound, while the Choir of Clare College goes for a more straight-toned and ancient tone; my personal preference is for the latter, but a library supporting a choral curriculum would do well to collect examples of both for pedagogical purposes. Apart from the *Stabat Mater* setting, these two releases offer very different programs; the Clare College recording incorporates contemporary works by Pēteris Vasks and James MacMillan, that complement the Pärt pieces nicely.

FOR OUR TIME AND FOR ALL TIMES - *TransCentury Communications*

Arvo Pärt: Stabat Mater; Salve Regina; Magnificat; Nunc dimittis; Peace upon You, Jerusalem; L'abbé Agathon. Gloriæ Dei Cantores conducted by Richard J. Pugsley. GDC Recordings. \$19.99 (SACD).

American Psalmody, Volume 1: Music of Samuel Adler, Charles Ives, Alan Hovhaness, Daniel Pinkham, Ronald A. Nelson, Robert Starer, Howard Hanson, and Randall Thompson. Gloriæ Dei Cantores conducted by Elizabeth C. Patterson. GDC Recordings. \$16.99.

“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” reads Matthew 6:34, which is to say there is no use worrying about tomorrow, since it will provide plenty of worries of its own. Yet it is well-nigh impossible now *not* to worry about tomorrow and, indeed, to worry that the worries tomorrow will bring will only extend and expand those of today...and then the next day will make things still worse...and on and on. A touch or two of the peace “which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) is very much to be wished for now - no matter what one’s individual religious or spiritual beliefs may be.

It is in times like these - and let us remember that there have been many earlier times filled with deep and justified fear, worry and uncertainty in terms both of health and of economic viability - that music, at least some music, can provide a combination of uplift and calm that can help counteract the frenetic thoughts and endlessly circulating worry and near-panic that pervade our lives today.

Yet one would not expect to find calming, uplifting music being written by contemporary composers: most are better known for dramatic, dissonant, intense music that is difficult to perform (and frequently difficult to listen to) than they are for anything remotely soothing. Arvo Pärt, however, is a notable, *very* notable, exception. The famed Estonian composer (born 1935) did go through a neo-Schoenbergian period early in his compositional life (and was rather imitative of Shostakovich and Prokofiev still earlier). But he concluded nearly half a century ago that those approaches were, for him, dead ends - and that he needed to return to the roots of much Western music, in the form of Gregorian chant, to find a new way forward. The result was a compositional technique that Pärt calls *tintinnabuli*, the word itself evoking bell sounds and minimalism - which pretty well describes how works created by Pärt using the technique come across to an audience.

Unlike other self-invented compositional approaches, though, Pärt’s does not require significant analysis or academic study to prepare listeners to experience it: whatever the technical specifics Pärt uses to create his chant-infused pieces, these are works that reach out to audiences’ emotions and provoke contemplative, uplifting and calming features that are intuitively understandable. All six works sung by the marvelous Gloriæ Dei Cantores choral group under Richard K. Pugsley on a new SACD from GDC Recordings speak beautifully to a modern audience - even one unfamiliar

with Latin, the language of most of these pieces, and equally unfamiliar with the specific religious connotations and purposes of the pieces. *Stabat Mater*, the longest work here, produces an immediate feeling of eternity through a two-and-a-half-minute introduction for strings before the chorus even enters - and weaves a 25-minute spell of resolution and resignation, of acceptance, in musical language that certainly fits the topic (the suffering of the Virgin Mary at Christ's Crucifixion) but that also ultimately proffers a message of hope. *Salve Regina* ("Hail, Queen"), directed at Mary, is declaimed, almost spoken, in Pärt's work, whose modest pulsing carries the music along in a series of small, gentle waves. *Magnificat* is praise *by* Mary, and Pärt invests it with an otherworldliness that requires a perfectly balanced chorus with clear enunciation in even the quietest passages - providing a fine example of just how good *Gloriæ Dei Cantores* is. *Nunc dimittis* specifically asks God to allow His servant to depart in peace, and here the sense of peacefulness is palpable throughout. *Peace upon You, Jerusalem* - which is actually placed first on the disc - is a somewhat brighter, more-upbeat work, one in which the higher registers of the female voices have a distinct bell-like quality that produces a lovely blending at the conclusion. And then there is the most-unusual piece here: *L'abbé Agathon*, for voices and eight cellos, or four violas and four cellos - a work that draws not on traditional liturgical texts but on the story of one man who showed the purity and totality of his love by being willing to exchange his body for that of a leper. Placed second on the disc - just before *Salve Regina* - it combines instrumental effectiveness (including some telling *pizzicato* material) with a French vocal narrative, both spoken and sung, that makes the story more multifaceted than are the words of the other works here, but no less heartfelt and uplifting. The simplicity and directness of the setting makes it almost liturgical and lets it fit neatly among the Latin material elsewhere on this recording - helping turn this release as a whole into an experience that is both calming and highly meaningful.

-TransCentury Communications

PÄRT *Stabat Mater. Peace Upon You, Jerusalem. L'abbé Agathon. Salve Regina. Magnificat. Nunc dimittis* • Richard K. Pugsley, cond; Gloriæ Dei Cantores • GLORIÆ DEI CANTORES 065 (SACD: 69:02 [u](#))

Everything in this collection of music by Arvo Pärt has been recorded before, many of the works more than once. While I will not claim that in each case this is the finest performance available, I can say that every performance here is competitive.

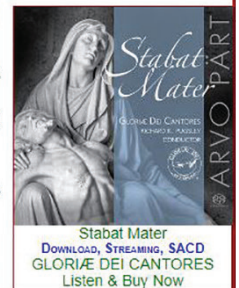
By now most *Fanfare* readers know what to expect from this acclaimed and popular Estonian composer. Pärt's music moves slowly and often quietly. The booklet opens with a quote that is a helpful guide to understanding his aesthetic: "Music is my friend, ever-understanding. Compassionate. Forgiving, it's a comforter, the handkerchief for drying my tears of sadness, the source of my tears of joy. My liberation and flight. But also, a painful thorn in my flesh and soul, that which makes me sober and teaches humility."

Peace upon You, Jerusalem is a setting of Psalm 122 for women's voices. If you think of Pärt's music as being unvaryingly quiet and inward-looking, this work will change your mind. There is a wide variety of mood and color, and the music reflects the rejoicing of the pilgrims making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. *L'abbé Agathon*, which follows, is actually a mini-drama—a musical depiction of the legend of an elderly abbot who is tested by a leper whom he comes across. A string ensemble joins the choir and provides rhythmic vigor and a broader color palette than is typical of Pärt. The score makes imaginative use of pizzicato techniques to expand and underline the drama of the abbot's encounter.

The remaining four works set standard liturgical texts. *Salve Regina* is performed in its original version for choir and organ. This is, to my ears, one of Pärt's masterpieces. It was composed in 2001 on commission from the cathedral in Essen, and made use of all of the church's choirs: children's, men's, women's, and mixed, which were placed in galleries throughout the church. I only listened to this recording in two-channel stereo, but even in that mode it created the impression of space intended by the composer. Pärt takes a very simple and beautiful melody, reminiscent of plainchant but in fact his own, and expands it gradually into eight parts in a stunning climax. *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* are two exquisitely beautiful shorter pieces that serve as a bridge between *Salve Regina* and the major work on the disc, the 25-minute *Stabat Mater*.

There have been a number of recordings of *Stabat Mater*. This one stands near or at the top of the competitive pile. Although much of the music is marked by the typical inward-looking quietness we associate with Pärt, there are contrasting sections of great drama. Conductor Richard Pugsley and his choral and instrumental forces scale everything perfectly. The contrasts are jarring, as they were meant to be, but the overall shape of the score is not lost. This is music that presents the listener with both pain and consolation, and it is incumbent on the performers to figure out how to unite those contrasting elements. It is accomplished in large part by taking great care with transitions, whether they are transitions of tempo, color, or dynamics. The bridging from one mood to the other must be judicious and very thoughtfully handled.

There are many discs featuring Pärt's choral writing, as a glance at the *Fanfare* Archive will testify. This is one of the finest. Gloriæ Dei Cantores was founded in 1988 as the resident choir of the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts. Their intonation is impeccable, their blending of voices is complete, and their ability to produce ethereal pianissimos while maintaining tonal body is very special. Pugsley keeps a firm pulse on music that could, and sometimes does, lose its shape under less capable hands. The recorded sound finds the right balance between spaciousness and clarity, and James E. Jordan's notes are very informative. Finally, great praise to Gloriæ Dei Cantores for providing, on their own label, complete texts and translations. Recommended with enthusiasm. **Henry Fogel**



Stabat Mater
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Arvo PÄRT (b. 1935)

Peace upon you, Jerusalem (2002) [4:50]

L'abbé Agathon (2004-08) [14:34]

Salve Regina (2002) [11:35]

Magnificat (1989) [6:28]

Nunc dimittis (2001) [8:22]

Stabat Mater (1985/2008) [25:09]

Gloriæ Dei Cantores/Richard K Pugsley

rec. 2018/19, Church of the Transfiguration, Orleans, USA.

DSD

Texts & translations included

GLORIAE DEI CANTORES GDCD065 SACD [69:02]

I may be wrong, but I don't believe that the American choir, Gloriæ Dei Cantores has previously recorded any music by Arvo Pärt. They now fill that gap in their discography with an album devoted entirely to his works.

To the best of my recollection, I don't believe I've previously heard either of the first two pieces on the programme. *Peace upon you, Jerusalem* sets words from Psalm 122 for female voices. The short setting takes its cue predominantly from the Psalmist's expression of joy at the prospect of going to Jerusalem. That, however, does not preclude some more pensive passages, including the very end of the piece. It's an attractive composition and it's eagerly performed here. My only reservation is that the sound of the women's voices sounds just a little mature; I sense they were using a bit too much vibrato.

L'abbé Agathon is an interesting piece. It tells a story concerning Father Agathon, one of the early Christian 'Desert Fathers'. Agathon is on his way to town to sell a few modest wares when he encounters a leper on the road. The leper asks for his help and Agathon carries him to the town. Once there, as Agathon sells his merchandise, the leper seeks further acts of kindness from him, culminating in a request to be taken back to their first meeting place. Agathon complies with all these requests and when he finally sets the leper back down in the road outside town the leper is revealed as an Angel. The work is scored for soprano solo (the leper), baritone solo (Agathon) female chorus (the narrators) and a small ensemble of strings (here 3/3/4/3/2). The piece is sung in French and I think that the sound made by the ladies of Gloriæ Dei Cantores is much better suited to that language. The music is very well fitted to the story it relates and the piece is appealing. It's also very sincere in the way the rather touching story is told. The performance is a good one, although I wasn't always convinced by the French pronunciation of the soprano soloist, Rachel McKendree, a member of the choir.

The *Salve Regina* is scored for mixed chorus and organ. It's a piece with which I'm familiar through the 2003 recording – the work's first, and made in the composer's presence – by Stephen Layton and Polyphony (Hyperion CDA67675). It was interesting to compare and contrast the two performances. On the Hyperion, the organ, played by Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, is rather more prominently balanced



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than is the case on this new version where James E. Jordan's contribution is heard, as it were, behind the choir. The Hyperion engineers place the singers rather more distantly from the listener as compared with the positioning of *Gloriæ Dei Cantores*. I think there are arguments to commend each approach. The choral writing is fairly simple and prayer-like. Much of it is subdued, though the music becomes briefly louder and more obviously fervent on a couple of occasions. I appreciated the sincerity of the present performance.

Some twelve years separates the composition of the Magnificat and the Nunc dimittis, both of which are for a *cappella* choir. I don't know if Pärt intended the latter piece as a companion for the Magnificat. The Magnificat is largely subdued and humble in nature, the writing quite sparse. I have a 1996 recording of this piece by Paul Hillier and Theatre of Voices, which was later reissued as part of a three-disc set. [Reviewing](#) that compilation, Dominy Clements specifically commented on the "pearlescent trebles and expressive shaping" that he heard in the performance of the Magnificat. On this present disc, Richard K Pugsley also shapes the music expressively. What interests me, though, is that in the Hillier recording, again made in the presence of the composer, the engineers went for a more distant balance in a recording of Pärt's music whereas the *Gloriæ Dei Cantores* singers are closer to the listener. I like the magical aura that a more distanced recording brings in this music but, on the other hand, it's valuable to hear the vocal lines and the austere harmonies with the clarity that's in evidence on this new recording. In his notes, James E. Jordan makes an interesting point about the Nunc dimittis, suggesting that Pärt conveyed in his music a sense of the architecture of the temple in which Simeon performed his priestly duties. The setting shares with the Magnificat a predominantly subdued and devotional ambience but in the Nunc dimittis the harmonic language is noticeably richer. As with many settings of this canticle, the music becomes louder and warmer at 'Lumen ad revelationem gentium' before subsiding again. Unlike the Magnificat, this canticle setting includes a 'Gloria' which, rather unusually, is very gentle. The members of *Gloriæ Dei Cantores* do these canticles very well.

The main item on the programme is the *Stabat Mater*. This was originally written, in 1985, for just three voices (SAT) and three string instruments (violin, viola and cello). Unfortunately, James E Jordan fails to mention in his notes that what is presented here is a version of the score for three-part choir (SAT) and string ensemble that was first performed in 2008. I know the work through the 1987 recording by the Hilliard Ensemble, which I suspect was the work's first recording (ECM 1325 831 959-2). Comparisons aren't appropriate since the forces used are so different. However, it is relevant to say that the original version for just six performers is, inevitably, more intimate than the version for larger forces. The performance by the Hillard Ensemble emphasises the bare, uncompromising nature of the music. It must be said, though, that this larger scale performance shows the piece in a different light. As performed here, the music has no lack of delicacy where appropriate but the more dramatic moments emerge with greater force.

It's an astonishing, indeed daring, piece. The musical style is sparse and the piece is constructed round fairly limited thematic and harmonic material. Furthermore, the tempo is slow for much of the time. It's therefore a considerable achievement by Arvo Pärt that he compels the listener's attention throughout, notwithstanding his economy of means. Here, the work is performed by a choir of 23 singers (8/8/7) and 8 players (3/3/2). The performance is very convincing, right from the very sorrowful opening. As I indicated earlier, the dramatic passages, such as 'juxta crucem lacrymosa' and 'Fac ut portem', are given with the force they need. Elsewhere, the singers deliver their exposed lines with admirable control – I noted as an example the sopranos' excellent negotiation of the stratospheric line at 'Fac me plagis vulnerari'. The end is masterly, not least for its extreme simplicity. In simple octaves, and unaccompanied, the choir sings 'Quando corpus morietur' before the strings join the singers, revisiting the material with which they launched the work. The 'Amen' then consists of an extended, descending line which starts in the soprano part and eventually finds its way, via the alto line, to the tenors, bringing the *Stabat Mater* to a profound and movingly simple end. This performance by *Gloriæ Dei Cantores* is very successful and if you already have a recording of the original version of the score then this fuller version is well worth your attention also for the different light it shines on this moving score.

This is an admirable set of performances of choral music by Arvo Pärt. The singing by *Gloriæ Dei Cantores* is both accomplished and committed. Though I voiced a mild reservation about the sound of the sopranos in some of this music I stress that this is a matter of subjective taste and may well be occasioned by the type of performances I've heard of Pärt's music in the past. The recorded sound on this hybrid SACD is very good.

John Quinn

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Gloriæ Dei Cantores: Arvo Pärt - Stabat Mater



The late Twentieth-and early Twenty-First-Centuries have been a rich and productive period for sacred choral composers. Sir John Tavener (1944 -2013), Krzysztof Penderecki (1933 -2020), Henryk Górecki (1933 -), and Tigran Mansurian (1939 -) are just a smattering of modern talent behind this ancient form. Estonian composer Arvo Pärt sits atop this collection of composers with the distinction of being the most performed, living composer today. Like Tavener, Pärt's conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy intensely colored his compositional themes. The composer's keen ear draws from 1000 years of choral writing shone through the prism of the Massachusetts-based choral/orchestral ensemble Gloriæ Dei Cantores, who pay homage to Pärt with a collection of his spiritual settings composed between 1985 (*Stabat Mater*) and 2008 (*L'abbé Agathon*)

Gloriæ Dei Cantores (“Singers to the Glory of God”) addresses religious choral music from medieval to contemporary. The group is affiliated with the Church of the Transfiguration in the town of Orleans, on Cape Cod, where it performs weekly services. The ensemble is a mixed-gender adult choir with 40 members founded in 1988 where it transformed from an amateur group into the present professional configuration by Elizabeth Patterson and is now under the baton of Richard Pugsley. The group has recorded since 1989, when it debuted with the collection of Catholic Mass settings, *Easter Day Mass*, featuring Eleventh Century Gregorian Chant mixed with pieces by Palestrina (c. 1525 -1594), Frescobaldi (1583 -1643), and Jean Langlais (1907 -1991).

The group’s full discography includes some 60 recordings ranging from traditional Gregorian Chant to Herbert Howells, including the notable recent releases *Rachmaninoff: All-Night Vigil, Op. 37* and *Gordon Myers: God’s Trombones*.

Presented here are settings for six religious texts ranging from the pastoral aire of the Coptic story of “L’abbe Agathon” to the composer’s arresting meditation on the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). The opening «Peace Upon You, Jerusalem» is Pärt’s treatment of Psalm 122, featuring two sopranos (Rachel McKendree and Sister Amanda Ortolani) and women’s chorus singing a cappella. This is the airiest performance on the recording, like a brief whisper in the ear of the Divine. The Marian hymn *Salve Regina* («Hail, O Queen») features organist James E. Jordan supporting the entire chorus. The reading gravely consonant with lengthy melodic lines carefully drawn from the chorus.

The *Nunc dimittis* is the traditional Gospel Canticle of Compline (The Night Office). Also known as the Song of Simeon, the text derives from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2, verses 29 through 32. Sister Amanda Ortolani again is featured in a solo soprano role. It is a hymn of peace and acceptance, a request, a prayer for release. The full chorus is the breath upon which the Ortolani gently walks.

The centerpiece is the title composition, *Stabat Mater* («Sad Mother»). The text is a 13th-century Christian Marian Hymn, portraying the Blessed Virgin’s suffering at the foot of the Cross. It was composed by either the Franciscan friar Jacopone da Todi or Pope Innocent III, and its title derives from the first line, “Stabat Mater dolorosa,” which means “the sorrowful mother was standing” (in translation, “At the Cross her station keeping...”). Many composers have written settings for the text, including Lassus, Palestrina, Vivaldi, both Scarlattis, and most notably, Pergolesi. With respect to Pärt’s setting, the composition illustrates the composer’s musical technique “tintinnabuli.” Half mysticism, half grounded theory, Pärt described the method in his comments on Tintinnabulation from arvopart.org:

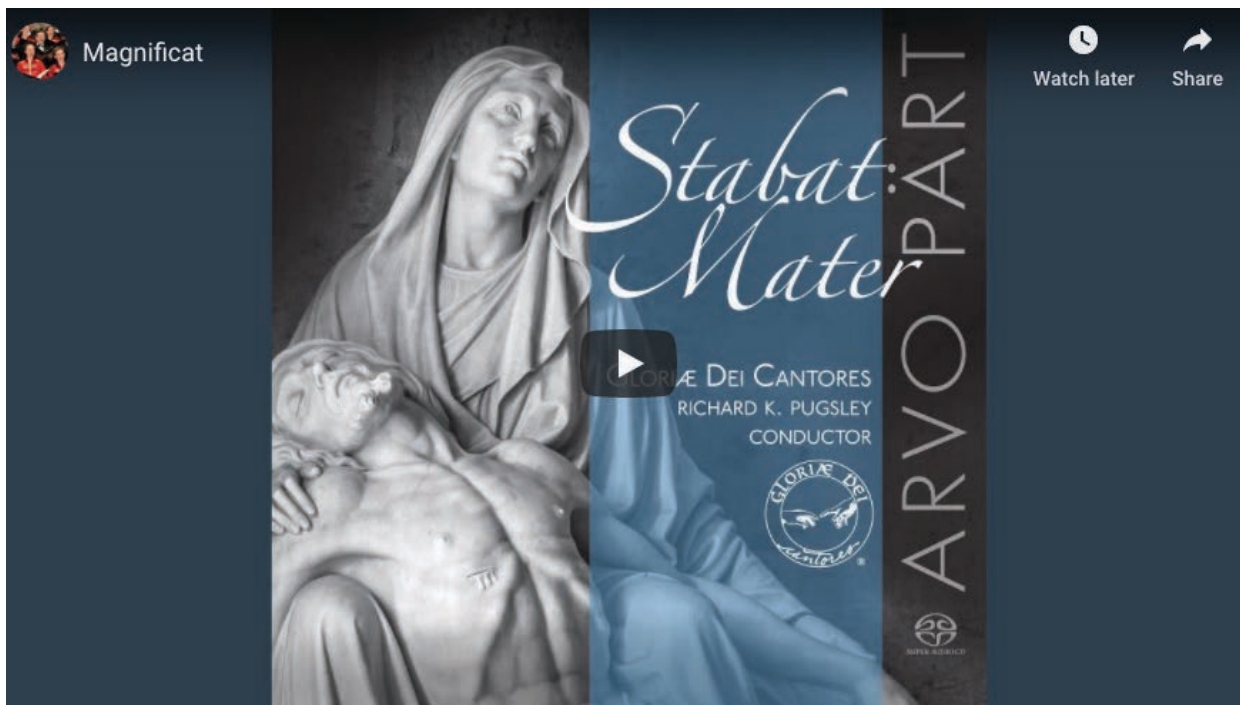
Tintinnabulation is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers—in my life, my music, my work. In my dark hours, I have a certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning...Here I am alone with silence. I have discovered it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a moment of silence comforts 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 line bells.

...the lingering sound of a ringing bell that occurs after the bell has been struck. That concrete

image is translated aurally in Pärt's *Stabat Mater*. The piece is sprawling with the composer addressing each of the text's 20 sections differently, interspersing instrumental dance rhythms that smack of the late Baroque. Triads dominate the piece: tintinnabuli character, a trio choir made up of soprano, alto, and tenor voices and a three-part string section of violins, violas and cellos. Gloriæ Die Cantores performances equal or better the many Pärt recitals found on ECM records and elsewhere. The super audio hybrid programming pays off with an efficiently realized presence that is warm without being stuffy and crystalline without being sharp edged. These performances are significant additions to the Pärt discography.

Track Listing

Peace Upon You, Jerusalem; L'abbe Agathon; Salve Regina; Magnificat; Nunc dimittis; Stabat Mater.



SEARCH

Arvo Part – Stabat Mater

11. May 2020 - 8:56



A new and deeply moving expression of the Truth that sustains the Universe

Stabat Mater, the new CD recording of music by the composer Arvo Pärt, performed by the Choir and orchestral ensemble of Glorie Dei Cantores under the direction of Richard K. Pugsley, represents a new and fresh take on sacred music, and it also is a new level reached by the performing artists and the sound engineering team that recorded this disc.

Arvo Pärt has been steadily gaining prominence in the classical music world for many years. His work became known to me around 2011, when a colleague of mine, Dr Nicholas Reeves, worked with the Estonian composer on a concert series performed that year. Although I had yet to hear Pärt's compositions, the enthusiasm Dr Reeves expressed was very strong.

The world of Orthodox Christian composers and musicians is very small in the West. Few composers have been effective at transmitting the *ethos* of the Eastern Orthodox Church through the lens of Western classical and choral music. Most of us (for I compose as well), find ourselves hitting a wall when trying to bring these two worlds together, with the usual result for decades being rather hit-and-miss in terms of any sort of authentic Orthodox Christian *ethos* in Western sacred music.

Arvo Pärt is one of the very few composers who has accomplished excellence and beauty in his approach. This CD, *Stabat Mater*, presents a stunning example of what happens when a deeply Orthodox worldview meets the heights of Western classical training and performance.

As a singer, composer and recording engineer that is deeply immersed in the Russian and Byzantine Orthodox Christian musical traditions, when I started to listen to the disc, I was challenged by something that was evocative of recent modern Western sacred works, but almost immediately the Orthodox ethos came through. That ethos is reflected in Pärt's compositional form of *Tintinnabuli*, which reflects something far different from the sentimentality of many great Western sacred works, but does something that is present in Orthodox Christian worship: It pushes the listener not into a memory of sacred events, but to "enter in" and be mystically present in those events, just as the Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services in the Orthodox Church also do. The form in which this happens is delightfully *different* from the techniques employed in the Slavic and Byzantine ethos, and while borrowing on Gregorian chant structure, Pärt's *Stabat Mater* does not merely meditate on the passion of Mary at the foot of her Son's Cross, *we become mystically present with her*.

All the selections on this disc are excellent. This is very serious music, not dark, not depressing, but possessing the serious, dead-on presentation that the Eastern Orthodox Church has always used in bringing us into the Divine reality of Christ's life, Passion, Death and Resurrection. To move beyond sentimental meditation into being present is a great gift, and Arvo Pärt gets us there in his work.

This is more evident when taken into account that the performers of Glorie Dei Cantores and Richard Pugsley approach this work steeped primarily in the Benedictine tradition of the Christian West. In listening to this disc, I cannot imagine a better interpretation of this music, both technically and spiritually, than what is presented here. A true meeting of East and West, neither side excluding the other, but standing *united* in the Truth of Christ. This is what happens on this disc.

The recording is superb. Maestro Pugsley, Paul Tingley co-produced this record, and the recording engineers Brad Michel and Dan Pfeiffer did a superlative job bringing this recording to life. The presence of the choir and orchestra is intimate and spacious at the same time, with all nuances of voice and instrument flawlessly presented to the listener.

With some Grammy Award nominations and wins on projects I have worked on as an experiential basis, I enthusiastically and gratefully congratulate this team on absolutely amazing work. I am very pleased that this recording is a part of my own collection.

More information about Stabat Mater, with a sample, can be found [here](#).

Source: Orthochristian.com

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Serbian Orthodox Church

- Solemn Welcome of Bishop Joankijje in Berane
18.05.2020 - 20:42
- Serbian Patriarch celebrated in the church of Saint George in Bezanija
18.05.2020 - 07:56
- His Grace Joankijje: We request religious freedom and rule of law and order in the state
17.05.2020 - 19:34
- Joankijje
16.05.2020 - 13:24
- His Grace Joankijje, Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic, and priests released
16.05.2020 - 14:16

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Orthodox Churches

- The Feast of the Samaritan Woman at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem
19.05.2020 - 09:55
- Corriere della sera: The accusations of Turkish magazine against the Ecumenical Patriarch are idiocy and insanity
19.05.2020 - 09:54
- Romanian Church rejects single-use spoons for Communion even in time of pandemic
19.05.2020 - 09:52
- Priests process through Tbilisi on Family Purity Day
19.05.2020 - 09:48
- Sumela monastery is expected to reopen at the end of June
18.05.2020 - 20:53

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News

- 7-story monument to St. Symeon the Myrrh-streamer being installed in Belgrade
20.05.2020 - 14:04
- Statement from the Chairman of the OCP Society on the Situation in Montenegro
16.05.2020 - 14:55
- Maronite Church to launch food and social assistance plan in Lebanon
12.05.2020 - 20:57
- Proclamation on National Day of Prayer, 2020
11.05.2020 - 09:47
- The Coptic Church allows weddings with few guests
04.05.2020 - 18:44

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"Stabat Mater": New sacred music by Arvo Pärt published

Orthodox Estonian Composer Combines New Medieval Poem "East" and "West"



"Stabat Mater": New sacred music by Arvo Pärt published

Orthodox Estonian Composer Combines New Medieval Poem "East" and "West"

May 9th, 2020, 10:44 am Estonia / Music / Christianity / Arvo.Pärt / Orthodox

Tallinn / New York, May 9th, 2020 (KAP) The latest work by the Estonian Russian Orthodox composer Arvo Pärt - "Stabat Mater" - has been released on CD these days. The performers are the choir and orchestra of the US ensemble "Gloriae Dei Cantores" under the direction of Richard K. Pugsley. According to music experts, the sacred music composition represents an impressive example of the encounter between the orthodox view and classic Western training. "East" and "West" are united in Pärt's new work, according to the unanimous view of the experts.

"Stabat mater" is the beginning of a medieval poem with an unsettled author. The Latin verses "Stabat mater dolorosa" (Eng. : "The mother stood there in pain") describe Our Lady in her pain about the crucified Jesus. Settings of the "Stabat Mater" can be found throughout music history, the old Gregorian chant melody was already taken up by Josquin and Palestrina in the 15th and 16th centuries. Variants by Vivaldi, Haydn, Schubert, Liszt and Verdi followed, and Arvo Pärt also created a version for 1985 for soprano, alto, tenor and string trio.

The composer, born in Estonia in 1935, is an Austrian citizen. Pärt began his musical education as a child, at 14 he wrote his first compositions, later he began studying music, worked as a sound engineer on the radio and studied composition. His early neoclassical work was influenced by the music of Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Bartok. Pärt then experimented with Schönberg's twelve-tone technique and musical serialism. His music aroused the reluctance of Soviet cultural officials because of the modern way of composing, which was not considered "system-conform", but above all because of the religious content. In the early 1970s, Pärt joined the Russian Orthodox Church. In a long creative break (1968-1976), in which the 3rd Symphony (1971) is the only authorized work, he dealt primarily with Gregorian chant, the school of Notre Dame and the music of the Renaissance (classical vocal polyphony). When Pärt presented the piano piece "Für Alina" in 1976, he had developed his personal style in the long remoteness in which the personal emotional world recedes in favor of a balance that has arisen from the ascetic.

He called this new language, which is decisive for this period of his life's work, the Tintinnabuli style. "Tintinnabulum" (Latin) means chimes. What is meant is the "ringing" of the triad, which stands for a reduction of the sound material to the absolutely essential.

In 1980, under pressure from the Soviet government, Arvo Pärt emigrated with his family to Vienna, where he received Austrian citizenship. From 1981 to 2008 he lived in Berlin. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he spent part of the year in his home in Estonia. Today he is one of the most respected composers of the present who always turns to religious topics, among others for the commissioned work "La Sindone" (The Shroud), an orchestral composition on the Turin shroud on the occasion of the Olympic Winter Games in Turin.

Pärt received a myriad of awards, including the Austrian Badge of Honor for Science and Art in 2015 and the Joseph Ratzinger Prize in 2017.



PÄRT *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem*^{1,2}. *L'abbé Agathon*^{1,3,5}. *Salve Regina*⁴. *Magnificat*¹. *Nunc dimittis*². *Stabat Mater*⁵ • Richard K. Pugsley (cond); ¹Rachel McKendree (sop); ²Sr. Amanda Ortolani (sop); ³Alexander Pugsley (bar); ⁴James E. Jordan (organ); ⁵string ensemble; Glorïae Dei Cantores • GLORIAE DEI CANTORES 065 (69:02)

A new CD from the marvelous vocal ensemble Glorïae Dei Cantores and their Director Richard K. Pugsley surveys choral works by Arvo Pärt. All of the works display the economy and clarity of expression for which the Estonian composer is so well known. But there is quite a bit of variety as well. For example, the *Salve Regina* (2002), composed for the 1150th anniversary of the founding of Essen Abbey and the "Golden Madonna" of Essen's Cathedral, "provided an opportunity for (Pärt) to write a work linking all four of the church's choirs with organ accompaniment." Twice during Pärt's setting of the *Stabat Mater*, the music features glorious eight-part choral writing. *L'abbé Agathon* (2004/8) relates the ancient tale of Abbot Agathon, who brings aid to a leper, only to find out the afflicted person is actually "an angel of the Lord come to put him to the trial." In this 14-minute piece, Arvo Pärt proves himself a master storyteller. The work is scored for soprano (The Leper) and baritone (Father Agathon) solos, women's chorus (serving the function of the narrator), and strings. Pärt brilliantly employs all of these forces, as well as poignant moments of silence, to portray the story's tension, and ultimately, its transformative message. The centerpiece of this recording also serves as its title, *Stabat Mater*. Pärt composed his 1985 setting of the sacred text in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alban Berg. As in the case of another great sacred choral works from the same period, the *Te Deum*, Pärt invokes visual imagery as inspiration. In the case of the *Te Deum*, Pärt observes: "I am reminded of the sense of immeasurable serenity imparted by a mountain panorama." In the *Stabat Mater*, a narrative of Mary weeping at the foot of Jesus's Cross, Pärt reveals: "It is just like the opposing elements, for instance the lava erupting from the volcano, flowing into the water. It seems impossible that such different elements would ever meet; however, in this piece this is exactly what happens. The text presents us the simultaneous existence of immeasurable pain of the event and potential consolation." That duality is expressed by Pärt in the chorus's opening "Amen." Another duality found in the text (and Pärt's setting) is the hope of mortals to share in both Christ's pain and His transfiguration. Pärt connects the human and divine components via a series of country dances, played by the strings between portions of the sacred text. It's a stunning technique, one that both jars and moves the listener. Throughout, the vocal writing is arrestingly beautiful and poignant, all the more so for its simplicity and directness of expression. Pärt maintains the rapt tension of this 24-minute work from start to finish, and the cumulative impact is breathtaking. As I mentioned, Pärt composed the *Stabat Mater* in honor of Alban Berg. I'd like to think that the composer of his Violin Concerto in memory of Manon Gropius, itself an heartbreakingly eloquent portrait of pain and transformation, would have been gratified by the tribute. While I wanted to make special mention of the three works I've discussed, all 6 of the included pieces are characteristic of Pärt's work, of a very high level, and worth your attention.

Pärt's sound world, exemplified here by his choral music, demands performers with pure and beautiful tone, and impeccable intonation. Sometimes, for expressive purposes, Pärt also extends his vocalists to their limits. In all instances, the Glorïae Dei Cantores, an ensemble based in the Cape Cod town of Orleans, MA, acquits itself in superb fashion. The singing is unfailingly secure, lovely, and expressive. This of course is a tribute to the members of the ensemble and their Director, Richard K. Pugsley, who leads with an assured and sensitive hand throughout. The soloists all sing well, and the string ensembles in *L'abbé Agathon* and the *Stabat Mater* play with a beauty of tone and unanimity of articulation and intonation comparable to their vocal colleagues. One small criticism: the French diction in *L'abbé Agathon* by both the women's chorus and soloist lacks the final degree of polish (for example, "un gâteau" is pronounced "une"). But overall, this is a magnificent representation of first-rate choral music. The recording, made in the Orleans, MA The Church of the Transfiguration, is brimming with warmth and atmosphere, as well as a clarity befitting the repertoire. James E. Jordan's liner notes are entertaining, informative, and at times, quite moving. Bravo. Full texts and translations as well. Highly recommended. —Ken Meltzer

5 Stars: Glorïae Dei Cantores shines in choral music by Arvo Pärt

CADENCE JAZZ WORLD

Stabat Mater

Gloriae Dei Cantores 065

Peace Upon You, Jerusalem/ L'Abbe Agathon/ Salve Regina/ Magnificat/ Nunc dimittis/ Stabat Mater 69:02

I have often said that it can be difficult to tell the difference between some contemporary composed classical music and some improvised music. So here is a completely composed piece under review.

Arvo Pärt, born in Estonia in 1935 is considered to be a minimalist composer along with people such as John Adams, Phillip Glass, Terry Riley and others. Minimalism has various influences including music from Asia with its repetitions. Like all such composers, each brings a personal approach to the music within that overall genre. Today, Pärt is one of the most performed contemporary composers.

Stabat Mater is a form of prayer on the suffering of Mary. This recording includes other works that are related to the Stabat Mater. Part 1 begins with a section from psalm 122 about the ascent to Jerusalem. This section features two soprano soloists, accompanied by chorus and orchestra. The influence of Gregorian Chant can be heard throughout the whole work but is clearly heard in the choral accompaniment.

Then there is the story of L'abbe Agathon or Father Agathon, an old man who turned to the desert in order to understand Christ's life more fully. This section features soprano and baritone soloists, women's choir violi and celli.

Salve Regina is performed by choir and organ and uses what Pärt calls his "tintinnabull" technique of composing which is supposed to have specific effects on the ear of the listener related to tinnitus, or the hearing of the ringing of bells. The text is from an 11th century monk, Herman von Reichenau.

The Magnificat uses Pärt's technique coupled with more straightforward compositional techniques. This section is about Mary's response to the angels. This section features soprano soloist with full chorus.

Nunc dimittis is about St Simeon's song of witness. It uses space and silence with the full chorus and soprano solo. It uses various harmonic techniques moving from major to minor to modes.

And finally the main section, the Stabat Mater itself, the longest section of this recording. This piece was commissioned by the Alban Berg foundation on the 100th anniversary of Berg's birth. The piece is about Mary's suffering watching Jesus die on the cross. It has tremendous emotional content.

Musically, like so many religious works, it can stand on its own as a concert work. It is a great work for lovers of choral music. The harmonies and structures of the piece can be listened to casually or with great seriousness. Like all great works, the more carefully one listens, the greater the rewards. And, as someone familiar with the work of Pärt, I can say this is an excellent performance.

In terms of recommendations to readers of Cadence, any one interested in composition or choral works, regardless of genre will surely enjoy this wonderful recording.

—Bernie Koenig