

## **VENI CREATOR FOR CHOIR AND ORGAN BY ARVO PÄRT. THE STYLISTIC AND INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS – CONDUCTOR’S GUIDE**

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**SUMMARY.** “Veni Creator”, composed in 2006 at the request of the German Bishops’ Conference, premiered in Fulda Cathedral, Germany, conducted by Franz-Peter Huber. The work, written for mixed choir and organ, is based on the first two stanzas of a well-known Catholic hymn invoking the Holy Spirit. The composition, though fitting within Arvo Pärt’s *Tintinnabuli* style, diverges in several aspects, including its use of a major key (G major), a fixed meter (3/4), and a precise dynamic range. The piece creates an almost dance-like atmosphere through its melodic and rhythmic interplay between the choir and organ, which is characterized by ascending and descending arpeggiated figures. Stylistically, the work emphasizes nobility and elegance of phrasing, with pure, simple vocal delivery. Performers are instructed to maintain intonation accuracy and manage dynamic changes with emotional weight, particularly in moments of diminuendo. The unison between male and female voice pairs is key to achieving timbral homogeneity and attention to phrasing and the interpretation of pauses helps maintain the expressive flow.

**Keywords:** Veni Creator, Arvo Pärt, Stylistic, interpretative, analysis, conductor, guide

### **Arvo Pärt and *Tintinnabuli***

In the last three decades, Arvo Pärt has become a global compositional phenomenon, as evidenced by his inclusion in most musical seasons of specialized institutions, a fact confirmed by his extensive discography, which

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features many renowned artists<sup>2</sup>. His music is associated with cinema (appearing in over 100 films)<sup>3</sup> and theatre<sup>4</sup>, with numerous documentaries made about and featuring the composer<sup>5</sup>. Pärt has received awards and distinctions worldwide<sup>6</sup> and has also gained recognition online<sup>7</sup>. In 2012, musicologist Andrew Shenton described him in the introductory note of *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt* as “one of the most influential and most performed contemporary composers”<sup>8</sup> and in 2015, Günter Atteln, the director of the documentary made for Pärt’s 80th birthday, simply stated, “Arvo Pärt is the most performed composer in the world”.<sup>9</sup>

His compositional style was influenced by the major movements of the 20th century, starting with the neoclassicism of the Russian school, passing through dodecaphonic serialism, and reaching the minimalist movement of the 1960s. Beginning with minimalism, Arvo Pärt, using the same principles (such as economy of means and the use of diatonic tonality), developed his own original compositional system, which he called *tintinnabuli*.<sup>10</sup> In simple terms, “Tintinnabuli” is a compositional style created by Arvo Pärt which explores a minimalist approach characterized by the interplay between two voices: one voice moving in a stepwise motion, representing the tintinnabulation (bell-like sounds), and another (melodic) voice moving in arpeggios, outlining the triad harmony.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hilliard Ensemble, Ars Nova Singers, Theatre of Voices, Ars Nova Copenhagen, The Pro Arte Singers, Nederlands Kamerkoor, King’s College Choir, The King’s Singers, Handel Choir of Baltimore, The Choir of Westminster Cathedral, Carmina Mundi Chamber Choir, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, The Choir of New College Oxford, Bournemouth Sinfonietta, The London Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Rundfunk Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, Hungarian State Opera Orchestra, Brass Ensemble Staatsorchester Stuttgart etc.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0701736/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0701736/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1)

<sup>4</sup> *Arvo Pärt | Robert Wilson: Adam’s Passion* (premierea mondială în anul 2015, la Tallin, Estonia).

<sup>5</sup> Documentaries: *Arvo Pärt. November 1978* (1978), *Arvo Pärt - And Then Came the Evening and the Morning* (1990), *24 Preludes for a Fugue* (2002), *Sounds and Silence* (2009) *Playing Pärt* (2012), *The Lost Paradise* (2015), *Even If I Lose Everything* (2015), *That Part Feeling - the Universe of Arvo Part* (2019)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part-2/honorary-degrees-awards/>

<sup>7</sup> The work *Spiegel im Spiegel* has the highest number of views on YouTube: 3.001.699. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtFPdBUi7XQ>)

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Shenton, *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, ed. Andrew Shenton, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Günter Atteln, descriptive note of the documentary *The lost paradise*, ACCENTUS Music ACC20321, 2015. (<http://accentus.com/productions/arvopaert-robertwilson-thelostparadise>)

<sup>10</sup> Hillier, Paul. *Arvo Pärt*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p.6.

### **Veni Creator - General Information**

Composed in 2006 – at the request of the Deutsche Bischofskonferenz (German Bishops' Conference), *Veni Creator* had its world premiere in the Fulda Cathedral – Germany, on September 28, 2006, with the choir *Capella Cathedralis Fulda* under the direction of conductor Franz-Peter Huber. The work is written for mixed choir and organ and has a strophic structure, with a short introduction. The score specifies both the tempo (m.m.=44) and the approximate duration of the music: 2' 30". Arvo Pärt uses the text of the well-known Catholic hymn<sup>11</sup>, from which he extracts only the first and second stanzas. It is an invocation of the Holy Spirit and is often used as a prayer, though it is most commonly associated with Gregorian chant. Here is the text in Latin and its translation into Romanian:

Veni, creator Spiritus  
**Coboară din ceruri, o Duhule Sfinte,**  
mentes tuorum visita,  
**din luminosul Tău tron ceresc**  
imple superna gratia,  
**vino, și umple-ne sufletele**  
quae tu creasti pectora.  
**și fă-le pe toate ale Tale.**

Accende lumen sensibus,  
**Ghidează-ne mințile cu lumina ta binecuvântată**  
infunde amorem cordibus,  
**cu dragoste umple-ne inimile**  
infirmi nostri corporis,  
**întărește-ne corpurile infirme**  
virtute firmans perpeti.  
**cu virtute și putere eternă.**  
Amen  
**Amin**

Although in terms of overall sound the piece fits within the Tininnabuli style, it also presents some exceptions. The first of these is the choice of key: **G major** – statistically speaking, the sound organization in most of the works

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<sup>11</sup> The origin of this hymn is quite controversial, but it is most often attributed to the Archbishop of Mainz (Germany) who lived in the 9th century (source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veni\\_Creator\\_Spiritus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veni_Creator_Spiritus))

tends to be in a **minor** mode. Another deviation from the characteristic principles of the style is that the meter proposed at the beginning of the piece is maintained unchanged throughout its duration. Most often, the prosody would dictate frequent changes in meter, but *Veni Creator* this time sets the text on a fixed, ternary structure (3/4). Another element that appears less frequently in Arvo Pärt's choral scores is the abundance and precision of dynamic markings, which appear almost at every new entrance of the voices. The melody of *Voice M* (entrusted to the choir) is also exceptional. The motives and phrases no longer have the classic *Cantus firmus* quality, but rather seem to resemble those of *Voice T* (which is intoned throughout the piece by the organ). Thus, we observe that the gradual motion with few and softened leaps in the opposite direction is replaced by frequent ascending or descending arpeggiated formulas.

### E.g. 1

Escaping the melodic rigor of the *Cantus firmus* ( $\text{♩}=44$  ca)

Melody based on arpeggiated formulas

43

S Ac - cen - de ...

A Ac - cen - de ...

T a - - sti

B pe - - cto - ra

### Arvo Pärt, *Veni creator*, mm. 43-49

Apart from the introduction (mm. 1-16) and the final coda (mm. 79-88), where the phenomenon of *hocket* or *punctualist polyphony*, characteristic of the *Tintinnabuli* style, appears, the rest of the vertical sound organization is essentially at a single voice – a fact that brings the sound quality into the realm of accompanied monody (where the organ serves a harmonic function). The melodic construction modality is based on the wave formed by the dialogue between the female and male voices, but in each of these two sections (stanzas – mm. 17-47, mm. 48-78), the voice pairs sing the same melodic line, in unison.

**E.g. 2**

(♩ = 44 ca)

Spi - ri - tus  
 Spi - ri - tus  
 men - tes tu - o - rum  
 men - tes tu - o - rum

**Arvo Pärt, *Veni creator*, mm. 22-28**

We also observe that the rhythmic organization of the choral melody alternates between anacrusis and crasis formulas, depending on the prosodic accent of the words. Each time the accent of the word falls on the second syllable, the organization is anacrusis, and conversely – when the accent is placed on the first syllable, it follows a strong beat (crasis).

**E.g. 3**

Crisis and anacrusis melodic formulas,  
 respecting the accented syllables of the words (♩ = 44 ca)

Crisis melodic formulas

Anacrusis melodic formulas

a - mo - rem cor - di - bus in - fir - ma  
 a - mo - rem cor - di - bus in - fir - ma

**Arvo Pärt, *Veni creator*, mm. 58-65**

By combining the two melodic-rhythmic formulas from the choir, along with the syncopated structure of the melody of *Voice T* from the organ, the piece acquires an almost dance-like character, evoking the slow pulse of the Renaissance genre of the *galliard*.

The absence of general pauses is, again, an exception to the *Tintinnabuli* style. It is quite rare for the sound flow in a choral work to remain uninterrupted from beginning to end. However, this aspect contributes to creating an overall atmosphere of singing that produces airy harmonies, characteristic of large spaces, where moments of solo organ intertwine gently with the motifs exposed by the voices. This atmosphere is also ensured by the choice of organ registers, which are, both in volume and timbre, particularly delicate (they seem to resemble the small 'bells' that also gave the *Tintinnabuli* style its name).

An emblematic element for this style appears in the final section: the pedal point of the ison type, or drone, created by the overlapping of a perfect fourth between the bass and tenor, which harmonically supports the entire final coda woven around the repetition of the word *Amen*.

**E.g. 4**

Coda: drone at a perfect fourth interval between the bass and tenor ( $\text{♩} = 44 \text{ ca}$ )

The image shows a musical score for the coda of Arvo Pärt's *Veni Creator*, measures 82-89. It consists of four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are singing the word "men" followed by a long rest and then "A - - - men". The piano accompaniment features a drone in the bass and tenor registers, with a perfect fourth interval between them. An arrow points to the drone in the bass part, labeled "ison-type pedal point". The tempo is marked "molto lunga \*" and the dynamics are "p Ferne".

**Arvo Pärt, *Veni creator*, mm. 82-89**

For a better understanding of the ingenious constructions, with an almost mathematical balance and symmetry, we present below the structural table of the work *Veni Creator*:

E.g. 5

Section	Introduction	Verse I				Verse II				Coda
m.	1-16	17-24	25-32	33-40	41-47	48-55	56-63	64-71	72-78	79-89
C H O I R	S	S		S		S		S		S
	A	A		A		A		A		A
	T		T		T		T		T	T
	B		B		B		B		B	B
Organ	o	o	o +pedalboard	o	o +pedalboard	o	o +pedalboard	o	o +pedalboard	o +pedalboard

Arvo Pärt, *Veni creator* – Structural Table

### Stylistic – Interpretative Aspects

The terms that could best encapsulate the general character of the sound in this work are **nobility** and **elegance** of phrasing. The vocal quality is the same as that established by the first *Tintinnabuli* recordings: pure, simple, natural singing, without vibrato. Phrase endings are in *decrescendo* (as indicated in the score), but this should not lead to the sound to become dry or expressionless. On the contrary, every moment of reducing sound intensity should be thought through more carefully in terms of emotional weight. We must apply greater air pressure and intensify attention<sup>12</sup> during diminuendo moments to ensure adherence to an essential element of Arvo Pärt's music: the accuracy of intonation.

<sup>12</sup> One of the factors to consider regarding vocal technique, in order to ensure intonation accuracy until the very end, is the position of the sound, or its placement in the resonators. This will ensure that, regardless of how large the diminuendo is or how long the sustained note is, both the same frequency and the same timbral color are maintained throughout the sound emission.



**E.g. 6**

Frequent diminuendo indications ( $\text{♩} = 44 \text{ ca}$ )

**Arvo Pärt, *Veni Creator*, mm. 22-28**

The introduction and the coda are built according to the same principle of accumulating tension. The voices enter one by one, and with each new repetition of an ever-higher pitch range, combined with the increasing sound amplitude, they reach a climax - at which point each of the two episodes ends. To articulate this sonic structure in both sections, the voices must focus on transferring (one from the other) the sound intensity, vocal color, and, not least, the expressive tension created up to the moment of their own entrance.

**E.g. 7**

Adopting the character and nuances of the singing ( $\text{♩} = 44 \text{ ca}$ )

**Arvo Pärt, *Veni Creator*, mm. 1-7**

As mentioned above, regarding the two stanzas that contain the actual message of the hymn *Veni Creator*, the discourse approaches the boundary of accompanied monody, where the choir intones the *Cantus*



*firmus* and the organ serves both as harmonic support and as a motor generating movement and fluency. In both stanzas, the melodic model is almost identical, concretizing a dialogue between the female and male voices. Even though there are no general pauses in the score, the melodic discourse of the voices is based on the principle of short motifs, framed by pauses. To ensure an expressive phrasing, with equal timbre and intonational precision, we will ask the performers, as in other cases, to treat the pauses in an “active” way.

Another challenging aspect in achieving choral homogeneity is the unison of voice pairs, an overlap that is almost always present in the melodic construction of the two stanzas (there are two exceptions, in measures 37-39, where the soprano sings alone, and in measure 45, where the phrase ending is entrusted solely to the bass). We will aim to include in the alto and bass parts only the more lyrical, more elastic voices, or, if the size of the ensemble allows, we will specifically use mezzo-sopranos and baritones. This way, we can more easily ensure timbral homogeneity when using registers that are less comfortable for the aforementioned parts.

### E.g. 8

The lower voices often sing in the high register (♩ =44 ca)

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 44 ca. The lyrics are 'tus. Ve - ni cre - a - - - tor'. The Alto part is circled in two places, with an arrow pointing to it and the text 'the Alto voice sings in the high register'.

### Arvo Pärt, *Veni Creator*, mm. 17-21

Regarding the fluidity of phrasing, we will suggest to the performers who are executing the melodic dialogue not only take on the tone from the voice that has finished, but, as much as possible, to also adopt the vocal color or interpretive character. This way, the flow of the prayer's message, clothed in sound, will have unity and continuity. A mental exercise that leads us toward this goal is the “thinking intonation” of the phrase preceding one's own entrance - by using internal hearing. This exercise is congruent with the

active treatment of pauses, as described above.

**Ex. 9**

Mental preparation for one's own sound attack ( $\downarrow = 44$  ca)

Musical score for Ex. 9, measures 55-57. It shows four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The Alto part is annotated with 'mf/imp' and a note that 'the Alto voice sings in the high register' with arrows pointing to specific notes in the upper register.

**Arvo Pärt, Veni Creator, mm. 50-57**

A special effect of sound suspension is created by the wide-reaching crown on the final chord of the organ. The conductor will ensure, through a specific gesture, the closure of the choral sound and the long maintenance of this tritone on the tonic (**G major**) in its second inversion.

**E.g. 10**

Managing the closure of the sound at the end of the piece ( $\downarrow = 44$  ca)

Musical score for E.g. 10, measures 82-83. It shows four vocal parts (S, A, T, B) and an organ part. Annotations include 'closure gesture for the choir' pointing to the end of the vocal lines and 'gesture to sustain the sound and then close for the organ' pointing to the organ's final chord. The organ part includes the instruction 'CP & CG: II p Ferne' and 'molto lunga \*'.

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The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Veni Creator' by Arvo Pärt, specifically measures 82-89. The score is written for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The Alto part is circled in red, and an arrow points to it with the text 'the Alto voice sings in the high register'. The lyrics are: 'tus. Ve - ni cre - a - - - tor'.

**Arvo Pärt, *Veni Creator*, mm. 82-89**

## REFERENCES

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