

Composers

Arvo Pärt

Arvo Pärt was born in Paide, Estonia, in 1935, and studied composition at the Tallinn Conservatory with Heino Eller. The occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union would have a profound effect on his life and music. Although Pärt had little access to what was happening in contemporary Western music, the early 1960s in Estonia saw many new methods of composition being brought into use and Pärt was at the forefront of the new movement. His *Nekrolog* was the first Estonian composition to employ serial technique. He continued with serialism through to the mid '60s in pieces such as *Symphony No. 1*, *Symphony No. 2* and *Perpetuum Mobile*, but later moved on to experiment, in works such as *Collage über BACH*, with collage techniques. Official judgment of Pärt's music veered between extremes, with certain works being praised and others, like the *Credo* of 1968, being banned.

Credo would prove to be the last of his collage pieces and after its composition, Pärt chose to enter the first of several periods of contemplative silence. He used the time to study French and Franco-Flemish choral music from the 14th to 16th centuries. At the very beginning of the 1970s, he wrote a few transitional compositions in the spirit of early European polyphony, such as his *Symphony No. 3* from 1971.

Pärt turned again to self-imposed silence, but re-emerged in 1976 after a radical transformation. He invented a technique he calls "tintinnabuli" (from the Latin, "little bells"), which he describes thus: "I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements—with one voice, two voices. I build with primitive materials—with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells and that is why I call it tintinnabulation."

There followed a rush of new works, and three of the 1977 pieces—*Fratres*, *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten* and *Tabula Rasa*—are still amongst Pärt's most highly regarded. As Pärt's music began to be performed in the West and he continued to struggle against Soviet officialdom, his frustration ultimately forced him, his wife Nora, and their two sons to emigrate in 1980. They settled initially in Vienna, where he took Austrian citizenship, and one year later, with a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange, moved to West Berlin where he still lives.

Pärt's 1990 setting of *The Beatitudes* actually begins with the blessing of the "poor in spirit," and as the Sermon on the Mount continues, with its familiar address to pacifists, troublemakers, and outcasts, Pärt's music follows every twist and turn of the biblical English text, the first the composer had ever set. The musical technique squeezes shocking beauty out of the simplest musical means: the vocal lines are derived from the basic materials of tonal music, simple diatonic scales and chords. The art is in the combination, and in the surprisingly dense and luscious sonorities that arise from strict musical logic, each at exactly the right expressive moment. The work builds to an inexorable climax ("Rejoice, and be exceeding glad"), followed by a beautiful and mysterious surprise: an elaborate cadenza for the pipe organ, whose function up to that point has been the provision of humble underpinning for the choir. The last becomes first as the energy of the work slowly runs back to ground.

Since leaving Estonia, Pärt has concentrated on setting religious texts, which have proved popular with choirs and ensembles around the world. Pärt's achievements were honored in his 61st year by his election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was nominated as 14th International Composer for the year 2000 by the Royal Academy of Music in London. In May 2003, he also received the "Contemporary Music Award" at the Classical Brit Awards ceremony at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Gavin Bryars

Gavin Bryars, prominent and prolific English composer, was born in Yorkshire in 1943. He initially established his musical reputation as a jazz bassist working in the early sixties with improvisers Derek Bailey and Tony Oxley. He abandoned improvisation in 1966 and worked for a time in the United States with John Cage. Subsequently he collaborated closely with composers such as Cornelius Cardew and John White. From 1969 to 1978 he taught in departments of Fine Art in Portsmouth and Leicester, and was instrumental in founding the legendary Portsmouth Sinfonia. He founded the music department at Leicester Polytechnic (later De Montfort University) and was professor of music there from 1986 to 1994.

His first major works as a composer were *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969) originally released on Brian Eno's Obscure label in 1975 and *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971).

Bryars' unaccompanied choral work, *And so ended Kant's travelling in this world* (1997), draws its text from an early Romantic biography of the most noted philosopher of the (secular) Enlightenment. This is not a story of flamboyant genius: at the end of a famously boring life (it was said that the citizens of Königsberg, where Kant lived his entire quiet life, actually did set their clocks according to his daily constitutional), Kant appears as a tired, bewildered old man, who, as Bryars tells it, endured a last "futile and inconclusive" journey across town to call unsuccessfully on an old friend before retiring to his rooms for good. Bryars sets Thomas De Quincey's offhand, conversational account of this non-event with extreme simplicity: he eschews counterpoint, follows the speech rhythms of the text faithfully, and works his way methodically through the tale with no repetitions for dramatic effect. This iron restraint allows for a final masterstroke: the title phrase, the last phrase of the text, is repeated three times, first in hushed unison, then with increasing tonal complexity, until, turning back to invoke "this world" one last time, the choir gently lays Immanuel Kant down to rest.

Among Bryars' other works are three string quartets and numerous commissions, including orchestral commissions for the Bournemouth Sinfonietta (*The Green Ray*, 1991), BBC Symphony Orchestra (*The War in Heaven*, 1993), and the Primavera Chamber Orchestra (*The Porazzi Fragment*, 1999, *Violin Concerto* 2000). Bryars' vocal works include a *Third Book of Madrigals* (2003-5) written for Red Byrd, *Eight Irish Madrigals* (2004) and *Nine Irish Madrigals* (2006-7).

He has written three full-length operas; *Medea* (1984), *Doctor Ox's Experiment* (1998), and "*G*" (2002). Since 2006 he has collaborated with Opera North Projects, initially with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) on Shakespeare sonnets *Nothing like the Sun* (2007) and subsequently on *Mercy and Grand* (2007-8). He has also composed prolifically for theater and dance. His successful recent collaboration with Merce Cunningham, *Biped*, is now in the Cunningham Company's repertoire and is playing world-wide. Numerous visual artists have also used Bryars' work.

Bryars' has made numerous recordings, and in 2000 he started his own label, GB Records. The Gavin Bryars Ensemble, founded in 1981, regularly tours internationally.

Gavin Bryars is Associate Research Fellow at Dartington College of Arts, UK. Gavin Bryars is married to Russian-born film director Anna Tchernakova, has three daughters (two from a previous marriage) and a son. He lives in England and British Columbia, Canada.

William Duckworth

American composer William Duckworth (b. 1943) is the composer of over 200 pieces of music, and the author of numerous books and articles, including *Virtual Music: How the Web Got Wired for Sound* (2005). In the mid 1990's he began Cathedral, a multi-year work of music and art for the web that went on-line June 10th, 1997. Incorporating both acoustic and computer music, live webcasts, and newly created virtual instruments, Cathedral is one of the first interactive works of music and art on the web. It can be found at www.monroestreet.com/Cathedral. The Cathedral Band, a component of the Cathedral project that includes New York pianist "Blue" Gene Tyranny, and Seattle's DJ Tamara and Stuart Dempster, gave its first New York performance on April 1, 2000, live and on the web.

As a composer, Duckworth is considered the founder of Post-minimalism, and his hour-long *Time Curve Preludes* for piano defines the post-minimal style. Since their 1979 premiere, these preludes have been heard on five continents, including the Spoleto Festival USA, where they were performed during the first live webcast ever given from the festival. The *Village Voice* called Duckworth's preludes "likely to be one of the 20th century piano cycles most often performed in the 21st." *Musical America* called them "a work of captivating beauty", and described listening to them as "hearing a kaleidoscope."

Duckworth's *Southern Harmony* (1980-81) is a great post-minimalist choral edifice built from the humblest of home-grown American musical materials: "shape note" singing, a style of communal music-making associated with the semi-literate Baptists and Methodists of the rural South. Shape notation, or "fa-sol-la," supplements traditional musical notation so that even those with no formal training can read simple chorales and "fuguing tunes" at sight; given mastery of a small number of shapes, a singer can move easily from marks on a page to mnemonic syllables and thence to hymn singing. It seems almost inevitable that an American post-minimalist composer, one with deep roots in the South, would find inspiration in the shape-note hymns collected in works such as *The Southern Harmony & Musical Companion* (Walker, 1835) and *The Sacred Harp* (White, 1844).

As a performer, Duckworth participated in the 1992 Cagemusicircus, a John Cage memorial concert at New York's Symphony Space, playing Cage's *Speech* on a short-wave radio, while Laurie Anderson read from the daily papers. He also closed the 18-hour marathon performance of Satie's *Vexations*, presented by the New York downtown club Roulette in 1993 to honor the 100-year anniversary of the work. *The New York Times* said Duckworth "played with uncanny steadiness and stillness."

Born in North Carolina in 1943, William Duckworth was educated at East Carolina University and the University of Illinois, where he studied composition with microtonal composer Ben Johnston, himself a student of John Cage and Harry Partch. Duckworth is a past recipient of the Walter Hinrichsen Award, endowed by C.F. Peters Corp. (1984), and has held both an NEA Composer Fellowship (1977) and an NEA Collaborative Fellowship (1983). The last was to compose *Simple Songs About Sex and War* with Hayden Carruth, winner of the 1997 National Book Award in poetry.

Duckworth currently holds a position at Bucknell University, teaching computer music composition, and a class in 20th-century American music called Jazz, Rock, and the Avant Garde. A 1992 Rolling Stone magazine profile called him a "hip, bright, innovative" teacher who "opens up worlds" students never knew existed.

Ruth Lomon

Composer Ruth Lomon was born in Montreal, Canada in 1930. Her prolific and distinguished composing career spans five decades, and includes not only composing, but private teaching, research, and active membership and service in a wide variety of professional associations and academic settings. She is currently Composer/Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University, and Composer-in-Residence for Boston Secession.

Ruth Lomon's new multilingual oratorio, *Testimony of Witnesses*, is based on the poetry of Holocaust victims and survivors. The concert-length work is scored for chorus, orchestra, and soloists. The texts — in Hebrew, French, German, Italian, Polish, English, and Yiddish — represent the personal experience of sixteen survivors and victims, including ten individual women and children, and reflect the international impact of the Holocaust and the variety of individuals and communities that were forever changed by it. Ms. Lomon received a grant from the Hadassah International Research Center (now the Hadassah Brandeis Institute) for the completion of *Testimony of Witnesses*.

As a composer, she has been honored with numerous awards and fellowships, including the Bunting/Harvard fellowship (1995-96) and a MacDowell/Norlin fellowship, and has over thirty commissions and artistic collaborations to her credit. Ms. Lomon has also received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New Mexico Arts Division, the New England Foundation for the Arts, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation and the Yaddo foundation.

As a fellow of the Bunting Institute, Ms. Lomon composed *Songs of Remembrance*, a song cycle on poems of the Holocaust. This hour-length work was premiered at the John Knowles Paine Concert Hall, Harvard University, and has since had numerous performances including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., the Bremerhaven Memorial Museum, Germany (Nov. '07), and the IAWM Congress in London, UK (July '99). In 2001 she also received the Chicago Professional Musicians Award for the tenth song of the cycle, which is set for mezzo soprano, English horn and piano.

In 1997, Ms. Lomon was commissioned by the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra to compose a trumpet concerto, *Odyssey*, for Charles Schlueter, then principal trumpet of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which was premiered in 1998 under the direction of Gisele Ben-Dor. Ms. Lomon's *Requiem* for full chorus and soprano solo accompanied by brass and woodwinds was premiered in Boston in 1997 by Coro Allegro, David Hodgkins, conductor.

In addition to her career in composing and teaching, Ruth Lomon is a distinguished pianist. She made her piano debut with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra in 1949, at the age of 18 while earning her Licentiate of Music at McGill University. Ruth concertized from 1971-1983 with the two-piano team Lomon and Wenglin in concerts of standard repertoire and specializing in the music of women composers. Ms. Lomon has performed her own works as a soloist internationally.

Ms. Lomon attended le Conservatoire de Quebec and McGill University. She continued her studies with Frances Judd Cooke at the New England Conservatory of Music and, later, with Witold Lutoslawski at Dartington College, England.