

'Da pacem Domine' of Arvo Pärt, based on a few medieval ideas.

1. Introduction

II
D
A pácem, Dómine, in di-é-bus nóstris :
Give peace O Lord in (these) days of ours

qui- a non est á-li- us qui púgnet pro nóbis,
for (there does) not exist another who would fight for us,

ni-si tu Dé-us nóster.
except Thee O God of us

The composition 'Da pacem Domine' (Give peace, o Lord) of Arvo Pärt for four-part choir or four soloists a cappella (2004/2006) is based on four medieval ideas:

- the cantus firmus technique (alto)
- the organum technique (parallel 10th between alto and bass)
- the hocket technique (between soprano and tenor)
- the faux bourdon cadence (as 'varietas' principle)

2. Cantus firmus

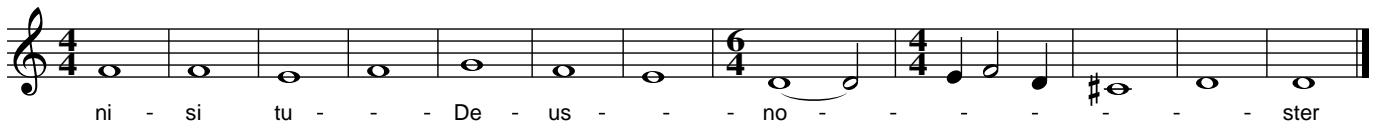
Pärt uses a Gregorian chant as a cantus firmus ('fixed song'), i.e. a cantus prius factus, a pre-existing melody forming the basis of his composition. Such a cantus firmus design was the norm through the 13th century: almost all of the music of the St. Martial and Notre Dame schools have a cantus firmus, as well as most 13th century motets. In the 14th century, this technique continued to be widely used for most sacred vocal music, although composers experimented with several forms of cantus firmus technique. Almost invariably was the cantus firmus a piece of Gregorian chant.

Pärt extended the chant by diminutions at the phrase ending with typical cadence (clausula) figures (the only exception is the diminution at bar 17/18 within a phrase). Two examples:

Figure 1: elaboration ending phrase 'Da pacem Domine in diebus nostris'



Figure 2: elaboration ending phrase 'nisi tu Deus noster'



2. Parallel organum

The first experiments of polyphonic two-part composition –which we call 'organum'– show two characteristics: parallel motion and equal notes. A musical treatise of the 9th century gives details of parallel doubling of the cantus firmus at the fourth, fifth or octave. In the late 12th century a kind of English organum (known as gymel) exists in which the voices move parallel to each other at the interval of a third.

Pärt applies –except in one occasion, bar 37– this medieval organum technique in his 'Da Pacem, Domine': parallel 10th between alto (cantus firmus, or with a medieval term; vox principalis) and bass (vox organalis as an accompaniment or harmonic reinforcement). As an example, the beginning of the piece.

Figure 3: Organum technique beginning Da Pacem Domine, Arvo Pärt

Vox principalis
Da pa - cem Do - mi - ne in di - e - bus _____

Vox organalis
8

3. Hocket technique

In European music, hocket was used primarily in vocal music of the 13th and early 14th centuries. It was a predominant characteristic of music of the Notre Dame school, during the ars antiqua, in which it was found in sacred vocal music. In the 14th century, the device was most often found in secular vocal music. The term 'hocket' comes from the French word 'hoquet' (in Old French also 'hocquet') meaning a shock, sudden interruption, hitch, hiccup.

In the 13th and 14th century composers and music theorists define the hocket as the breaking of a melody into single notes or very short phrases by means of rests (see below the Machaut example). In some cases of medieval practice of hocket, a single melody is shared between two (or occasionally more) voices such that alternately one voice sounds while the other rests. (see below example Credo and hocket from the 14th century Old Hall Manuscript)

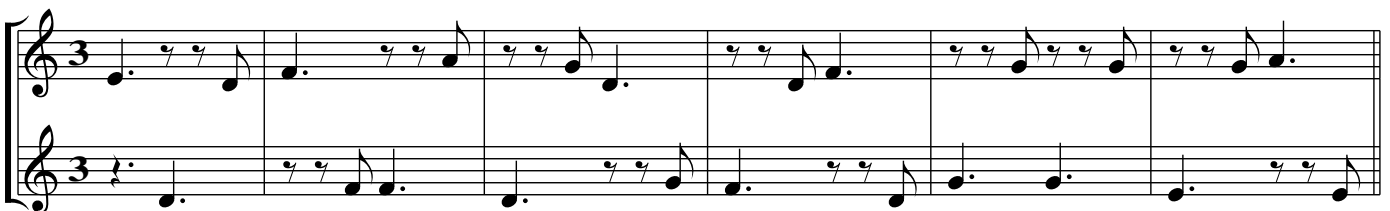
Figure 4: Fragment from Hocquetus David of Machaut (ca. 1300 – 1377)



Figure 5: Credo from the 14th century Old Hall Manuscript



Figure 6: Hocket based on the foregoing Credo



The hocket seems to be applied on the soprano and tenor parts of Pärt's 'Da pacem Domine': the melody of both soprano and tenor are broken into single notes (note the repetition of the rhythmic patterns in soprano and tenor). In addition: both melodies are elaborations of a D minor triad and are thus interrelated. In a way, the play between soprano and tenor can be described as heterophony: different forms of the same melody, simultaneously performed by – in this case – two parts.

Figure 7: Hocket in Da Pacem Domine, Arvo Pärt

Da - - - pa - - - - - cem Do

Da pa - - - - - cem Do - - - - -

8 Da - - - - - pa - - - - - cem Do

Da pa - - - - - cem

- - - mi - - - - - ne in di

mi - - - - - ne in di - - - - -

8 - - - - - mi - - - - - ne in di

Do - - - - - mi - - - - - ne in

Pärt separates the organum notes by small rests.

Figure 8: Rhythmic organization of Da Pacem Domine, Arvo Pärt

Da - - - pa - - - - - cem Do

Da pa - - - - - cem Do - - - mi - - - - - ne in di - - -

8 Da - - - - - pa - - - - - cem Do

Da pa - - - - - cem Do - - - mi - - - - - ne

4. Machaut cadence

The final ingredient is the Machaut cadence as a 'harmonisation' of the phrase diminutions as in Figure 1. Basically a faux bourdon (or in a historically not correct way: parallel sixth–three chords): figure 8 shows an example. In Figure 10 (reduction score) the faux bourdon parts are indented.

As you can see and hear, the faux bourdon cadences have not only a structural function (so your analysis can be based on these cadences) but they provide the composition 'varietas', the old esthetical principle of musical 'diversity'.

Figure 8: Machaut cadence, Arvo Pärt

5. Reduction score for study

On the following pages you will find for some study a reduction of the score of Pärt's Da Pacem Domine. The complete score can be obtained at Universal Edition A.G. Wien. Online recordings can be found at Spotify.com and Youtube.com. I prefer the performance of the Hilliard Ensemble from the CD Lamentate (ECM, 2005).

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Figure 10: Reduction Da Pacem Domine, Arvo Pärt

Musical score for measures 1-10 of 'Da pacem Domine'. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of four staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and two piano accompaniment staves (Right and Left Hand). The lyrics are: Da pa - cem Do - mi - ne in di - e - bus.

Musical score for measures 11-14 of 'Da pacem Domine'. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of four staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and two piano accompaniment staves (Right and Left Hand). The lyrics are: no - stris.

Musical score for measures 15-18 of 'Da pacem Domine'. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of four staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and two piano accompaniment staves (Right and Left Hand). The lyrics are: qui - a.

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a treble clef. The second staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and lyrics: "non - - - - - # - - - - - est". The third staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and a small '8' below it. The bottom staff is a bass line with a bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The system ends with a double bar line and a 4/4 time signature.

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and lyrics: "a - - - - - li - - - - - us - - - - -". Above the staff, the numbers "20" and "25" are written. The second staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and lyrics: "a - - - - - li - - - - - us - - - - -". The third staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and a small '8' below it. The bottom staff is a bass line with a bass clef and a sharp sign (#) below it. The system ends with a double bar line.

The third system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and lyrics: "us - - - - -". The second staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and lyrics: "us - - - - -". The third staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and a small '8' below it. The bottom staff is a bass line with a bass clef. The system ends with a double bar line.

30

qui pug - - - net pro no - - - -

8

35

(o) - - - - - bis

8

40

ni - - si tu - - - De - - us - - - - no - -

8

45

(o) - - - - - # - - - - - ster

8

Detailed description: This is a musical score for four staves in 4/4 time. The first staff is a vocal line with a long melisma starting at measure 45. The second staff is a vocal line with lyrics "(o) - - - - - # - - - - - ster" under the notes. The third staff is a piano accompaniment line. The fourth staff is a bass line. The score is enclosed in a double bar line.