

# Another Fine Cantata Singers Outing - The Boston Musical Intelligencer

by [Cashman Kerr Prince](#)

Arvo Pärt (Laupo Kikkas photo)

David Hoose brought a splendid end to Cantata Singers' splendid season with Bach and Pärt showcasing the talents of Cantata Singers while thrilling audiences with music old and new. Gathered in First Church, Cambridge on Friday, the vocalists and a small orchestra of strings, flutes, and organ played to packed pews. During almost two hours works of a personal and sacred character came into meaningful relationships, one with another.

J.S. Bach's motet, *Komm, Jesu, komm!*, BWV 229 with a text by Paul Thymich and a trio of continuo instrumentalists opened the evening. The Choral and Ari conveyed weariness of *der saure Weg*, seemingly at end of day, transformed into *der wahre Weg* as toils and turmoils are turned over to Jesus. The strong, pleading, antiphonal entry into this Choral built to a tightly contrapuntal rendition of "the sour path," turning back to *Komm* in the satisfying respite of yielding to God's road. The Arie returned with weight, gravitas, as the prayer turns to the mystery of freedom in submission. This is glorious music and was rendered beautifully. While the text is very personal, I found the appearance of individual voices in the choral texture to be a surprise. Would better blending have made of this text, setting, and performance a more collective appeal?

Pärt's *Adam's Lament* (2011) then received its the Boston premier. Written on commission from the European Union "Cultural Capital Istanbul 2010 and the Cultural Capital Tallinn 2011," the *Lament* sets a text by Saint Silouan of Athos, an Eastern Orthodox ascetic. Focusing on Adam, there is a commonality between Christianity and Islam. For Pärt, Adam is Everyman: "a collective term not merely for the whole of humanity, but for each individual, regardless of time, era, social class or religious affiliation. And this collective Adam has suffered and lamented on this earth for millennia." This text is one to which the composer has returned, from first attempts at setting it musically in the 1970s to the current work (seemingly setting it only in part). The meditation focuses on Adam cognizant of his sin, adrift in a post-lapsarian world where he foresees all the ills of his ill-fated action. At a few points in the text, there are trifold, trinitarian, repeats of key phrases. Mired in wracking grief, the work ends with an appeal for mercy, from ones who have lost grace like this forefather. In the profound text, anguish rises to a heartfelt beseeching, regret and agony borne stoically. Part of Pärt's *tintinnabuli* genre, as Hoose's program note elucidates, this rigorously organized music takes its structure from serialism even as it invites (perhaps unfairly) comparison with other "holy minimalists." While Pärt has composed in this style for some four decades, he continues to evolve even as the compositional language remains clearly his own. *Adam's Lament* has more atonal harmonies than earlier *tintinnabuli* examples. Long vocal lines

sing out over rhythmic interjections from the orchestra. As with the text, the music embraces darkness and lamentations, with minor-keyed harmonies and piercing wails, and it is interspersed with remembered joy, the music taking on a clarity and openness of harmony and texture. At *Vielika byla skorb' Adama* ("Great was Adam's anguish"), there is rapid, contrapuntal writing to express the anguish and anger accompanying the Fall. The composition ends a cappella, pleading for mercy, grace, and love. Throughout the twenty minutes of this music, Pärt finds the consonance in dissonance, tuning our ears to his wring-world bells, building weightily-wrought structures upon rock. (How fabulous would it be to hear Arvo Pärt setting Gerard Manley Hopkins?!)

Cantata Singers returned from intermission with strings, continuo and flutists, for J. S. Bach's *Mass in A*, BWV234 (for Lutheran worship). A world apart from Arvo Pärt, the mass is happier, even at times rollicking. The rhythmically twittering *Kyrie* for *ripieno* ensemble gives way to a *Christe eleison* for quartet of soloists, then the full ensemble gives us a fugal second *Kyrie*. The soloists, drawn from the ranks, sang from the center of the ensemble: Alexandra Whitfield (soprano); Jennifer Webb (alto); Jason Sabol (tenor); and Dana Whiteside (bass). The *Gloria* opens with full chorus voicing full-throated praise. The music turns introspective and the soloists return to the fore: Whiteside gave a powerfully moving rendition of *Domine Deus*; Whitfield's *Qui tollis* proved touching and poignant; Webb's *Quoniam tu solus sanctus* channeled marvelous quiet mastery and majestic singing. Full forces concluded with the *Cum Sancto Spiritu*, bringing the *Lutheran Mass*, the concert, and the season, to a joyous end.

**Cashman Kerr Prince, trained in Classics and Comparative Literature, is now a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Classical Studies at Wellesley College. He is also a cellist of some accomplishment, currently playing with the Brookline Symphony Orchestra.**

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