

Solfeggio

SATB Choir a cappella by Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

Background

“Arvo Pärt (born 11 September 1935; is an Estonian classical composer and one of the most prominent living composers of sacred music. Since the late 1970s, Pärt has worked in a minimalist style that employs his self-invented compositional technique, tintinnabuli. His music also takes inspiration from Gregorian chant.

Pärt was born in Paide, Järva County, Estonia. A prolonged struggle with Soviet officials led him to emigrate with his wife and their two sons in 1980. He lived first in Vienna, where he took Austrian citizenship, and then re-located to Berlin. He returned to Estonia around the turn of the 21st century and now lives alternately in Berlin and in Tallinn.¹

Composed in 1963, *Solfeggio* is one of Pärt’s early choral works. Consisting entirely of sustained major scales, at first glance it looks like just an exercise. However, the overall effect is really very beautiful.

Solfeggio is the use of syllables to sing the major scale, *do* being the first scale degree, *re* being the second, and so on.

Recordings

YouTube: [Solfeggio](#) - Moskva Noorte ja Üliõpilaste Segakoori esituses. Very beautiful recording

YouTube: [Solfeggio](#) Bragi a-capellakoor o.l.v. Rein de Vries

Analysis

Key: C Major

Meter: 4/4

Structure – This piece consists simply of the C Major scale sung ten times, with different voices singing and sustaining various scale degrees in order throughout the piece. For all its tonality, the final cadence is a tone cluster, consisting of *sol*, *la*, *si (ti)* and *do*.

¹ “Arvo Pärt”. Wikipedia. 30 May 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arvo_Pärt>.