THE SONG OF THE CONVERT:
RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND ITS IMPACT
ON THE MUSIC OF
FRANZ LISZT, ARVO PART, AND JOHN COLTRANE

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This essay and the “Concerto for Double Bass” together constitute the dissertation but are otherwise unrelated.
For Ena and my parents.
Contents:

Abstract 5

The Song of the Convert –

Chapter I. God and the Cutter 6

Chapter II. The Artist and Religious Conversion 17

Chapter III. Arvo Pärt: Clean Slate 31

Chapter IV. John Coltrane: Spiritual Awakening 80

Chapter V. Franz Liszt: The Abbé 123

Chapter VI. Conclusion 153

Appendix. John Coltrane’s Personal Booklist 167

Index. Sources 169
Abstract:

Religious faith has inspired the creation of music throughout history. A number of composers have reported that a religious conversion has had a profound impact upon their creative work. Franz Liszt, Arvo Part, and John Coltrane are examples of composers who have experienced a conversion mid-career where their music changed as a result. Though it is common for composers who have gone through a conversion to begin to write religious music in post-conversion periods, there are often striking differences between traditional sacred music and music composed by religious converts. My dissertation studies how religious conversions can provide a unique perspective for the creation of music due to the new and meaningful circumstances in the personal and spiritual lives of composers who are impacted. Through score analysis, particularly comparing works that are before and after conversion, we can see how religious experience takes effect on the creative work of a composer.
chapter one

God and the Cutter
Picture yourself a left-handed batter in a Major League Baseball game at the plate waiting for the pitcher to throw the ball. As you watch a 94 mile an hour missile take flight you must judge what kind of pitch is coming your way by determining its velocity and where it will eventually end up as you swing and attempt to make contact. You don’t have much time to make this decision. This particular pitch looks like a fastball. You gauge it by the spin you can see rotating on the ball as it comes toward the plate. About 5 feet before the ball reaches you, a distance too close to change your plan, the ball begins to curve, inside, towards you, coming straight at your knuckles as you swing and completely misjudge the contact point. Even if you do make contact, the only place the bat can connect is at its weak spot near your fingers.

Now picture yourself as a right-handed hitter. The same pitch, known as the cutter, is aimed directly at your hip, giving the appearance that you should move out of the way soon or risk a debilitating injury. Only in the last millisecond, it curves to the right 6 to 8 inches and lands over the plate for a strike. It’s almost unhittable.

Most Major League pitchers have a repertoire of pitches: a fastball, curve ball, knuckleball, slider, change-up, etc. Throughout a game, a pitcher scrolls through his arsenal strategically to keep a batter guessing what pitch will be thrown next. New York Yankees pitcher, Mariano Rivera, really only has one pitch – the cutter – and he throws it 92% of the time.¹ No other pitcher in the history of the game has had this kind of success with just one pitch. He has broken countless number of records and

¹ Mariano Saves, Sports Illustrated, p. 2
all baseball analysts agree that he is the best closer\textsuperscript{2} to ever play the game.\textsuperscript{3} Rivera has been on the mound to throw the final pitch in four World Series Championships and many of his post-season statistics tower over all other pitchers combined in the history of the game.\textsuperscript{4} Some hitters say that the best strategy against facing Rivera is to never swing at all; basically giving up.\textsuperscript{5} But this strategy is worthless when an opposing team needs a key run to win the game.

Panamanian born Mariano Rivera grew up in a poor town where his peers learned to play baseball with cardboard cutouts for gloves and downed tree branches for bats. His father was a fisherman, which was the trade that Mariano learned, almost losing his life in a fishing accident at the age of 19.\textsuperscript{6} Not long after, he was signed to the New York Yankees, never having benefited from playing college ball or receiving the kind of coaching that most professionals had. After spending several years in the Minor Leagues, his trial period in the Big-Leagues yielded only modest results. But Rivera began to throw his cutter at some point during the 1997 season, and it took the Yankees coaching staff by surprise. He says that it just happened one day unintentionally. “If you look at the videos from 1996, I didn’t

\textsuperscript{2} A closer is a pitcher who comes into the game in the last 1 to 2 innings in order to preserve the lead. His job is to be a reliable pitcher that will get the last 3 to 6 outs without giving up any hits or runs.

\textsuperscript{3} TBS Sports Hot Corner

\textsuperscript{4} Mariano Saves, Sports Illustrated, p. 3

\textsuperscript{5} ibid, p. 4

\textsuperscript{6} ESPN E:60
have the cutter. And then if you watch in 1997, the cutter was there.”\(^7\) He has been interviewed numerous times in reference to his success and about his signature pitch, often demonstrating the mechanics of his motions to those who inquire in an atmosphere where most athletes prefer to conceal their secrets. Rivera is confident that it can’t be replicated, as he demonstrates his grip and arm motion to other pitchers. "Nobody taught me the cutter. Nobody. It just happened. God…..taught me the cutter."\(^8\) “A thousand percent. A thousand percent sure. Just a gift from the Lord.”\(^9\)

Statements, like Rivera’s, that attribute providence as the factor in accounting for success are not so uncommon. However, whenever these spiritual narratives are addressed in journalism or scholarship, a few problems arise. For the subject of the narrative, metaphysical reasoning is often highlighted as the most central detail in his story. For the scholar or journalist, these details are non-empirical, unscientific, unbalanced, and uncitable. Therefore, a scholarly writer, whose task is to remain impartial and unopinionated, may consider it irresponsible to give spiritual claims much credence. We are left with a sharp disconnect; a gap between the subject of the narrative and those who tell his story.

In most circumstances we would be happy to let comments about spiritual matters lie without commentary. But as individuals accomplish something unique

\(^7\) Rivera, from *TBS Hot Corner*

\(^8\) *ibid*

\(^9\) *Mariano Saves*, Sports Illustrated, p. 1
or extraordinary, our curiosity would like to uncover how it occurred. For example, sports commentators frequently attempt to address Rivera's cutter in order to understand, in an age where hitters in professional baseball are breaking all previous records, how it is possible that one particular pitch thrown repeatedly throughout a span of nearly two decades has the result of vexing the very best athletes in the history of the sport. We are interested in looking at the mechanics and the regimen that the performer took to achieve his feet. We'd also like to know where he was from, what was going on politically at the time of his formative years, and what educational track he took. But upon asking the subject himself, who is a perfectly reasonable source in our study, we hit a brick wall and we're not entirely in agreement about how to proceed with our analysis.

So how exactly did Rivera become one of the games greatest baseball players of all time? Journalists and scholars may indeed provide answers to this question emphasizing many of the formative elements in his life, all of which are true and interesting, but Rivera will be “a thousand percent sure” that providence was involved. And these are two very different conclusions.

To be fair, journalists are not wrong to consider logic and reason in their explanation of Rivera as a pitching phenomenon, even if their conclusions differ from the pitchers’ personal narrative. A scientific look at his motions reveals how Rivera is uniquely built with longer appendages, giving him a physical advantage. While Rivera’s personal and spiritual narrative are quite compelling, it may not be
absolutely necessary to understand them if one simply wishes to study the complexities of his physical motion.

In contrast with the mechanics of professional athletes, the creative process of an artist is a different animal altogether. What an artist may be engaged with, thinking about, or moved by does indeed find itself into his work. As far more uncertainty is left open in understanding the genius of Beethoven or Monet than in the mechanics of a great cutter pitch, what was actually fundamental to the artist becomes essential when coming to grips with his work. In other words, it doesn’t really matter what Rivera is thinking if we want to understand his essence of his work. Yet, to understand the depths of the work of a great artist invites the study of his thinking, his narrative, and any entity that may have impacted his creative process.

This dissertation is about music, people who create it, and personal narratives dealing with spiritual events. As many have indicated that a religious conversion or deepened spiritual commitment led them to new forms of music, this study takes a close look at these changes through musical analysis and respectful consideration of the artist’s personal narratives. Composers who have emphasized a spiritual influence upon their music have often described their work in a similar manner to Mariano Rivera. For example, jazz musician John Coltrane, whose music took on a new form after committing himself to his new spiritual life, once said of one of his compositions, Meditations, that he “received” the music. English composer John Tavener, who converted to the Eastern Orthodox Christianity and
subsequently began to compose music of a very different kind, remarked: “It is not I who composes.” He also describes certain pieces of music where he claims that a metaphysical presence was with him during the writing process. Another convert to Eastern Orthodoxy, Arvo Pärt, who went through a similar musical transition as Tavener, has claimed that he has drawn upon the Church Fathers for musical instruction.

All of the above composers’ music changed as a result of conversion experiences. A look at scores and recordings from before and after these new commitments quickly reveals a difference in sound and approach. Pärt and Tavener, who had both once written atonal modernist music, begin to compose works that drew upon tonal music from centuries ago. Stravinsky, too, upon converting to Catholicism ceased to compose music like the Firebird and Le Sacre in place of developing his neo-classical style. Coinciding with conversions to Buddhism, Philip Glass and Giacanto Scelsi began to compose minimalist works. And these are only examples of musicians who have been impacted by a religious conversion mid-career. Leo Tolstoy and Wassily Kandinsky have also shared such religious commitments and subsequent related developments in their creative work.

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10 The Music of Silence, Tavener, p.130-138
11 Owens, p. 402
12 see Tolstoy's What is Art?
13 See Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art
Even though there is ample information about the spiritual lives of these composers, mostly in the words of the subjects themselves, the prominence of spirituality has been poorly addressed in biographies and press coverage. For example, Franz Liszt, who after a lengthy career as a piano virtuoso, composer, and conductor, moved into the Vatican and took the minor orders of the Catholic priesthood. He lived for another 20 years, composing music that was groundbreaking and starkly different from his earlier works. Even though he was quite prolific after he became Abbé Liszt, his late works have struggled to enter the performance canon. This is perhaps in part to how his constituents and the press had viewed his movement to the Church.\textsuperscript{14} The press in Liszt’s time considered that the composer had abandoned his career and they ceased covering him as if he had simply faded away.\textsuperscript{15} Even modern scholar, Alan Walker, who wrote the most exhaustive and comprehensive biography on Liszt,\textsuperscript{16} referred to the composers’ desire to become a priest as his \textit{religious mania}.\textsuperscript{17} The letters, diaries, and other writings of Franz Liszt are filled with spiritual language and well thought out

\textsuperscript{14} Arnold, p. 49

Wagner, too, did not understand Liszt’s taking of the minor orders and the music subsequently written after it. However, the alienation between the two composers included other reasons, primarily due to Wagner’s affair and marriage to Liszt’s daughter, Cosima.

\textsuperscript{15} Arnold, p. 49

\textsuperscript{16} Although Walker does indeed comment respectfully on Liszt’s spirituality when dealing with the composers’ later years, his assessment of Liszt’s youthful calling does not recognize that to a person of faith, considering a religious leadership role is reasonable and part of the logic associated with the observers worldview.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Franz Liszt, V.1}, Walker, p.117
descriptions of his philosophy on how he perceived his own music in relation to his faith. In Liszt’s case, expressing religious sentiments in his correspondence was a form of devotion and piety, quite normal to a religious observer. *Mania* is not a fair assessment of Liszt’s religious expressions, and the composer’s ideas and correspondences fit into the logic of a 19th century Catholic parishioner.

John Coltrane, who perhaps is unusually expressive about his work’s relationship to spirituality, is another example of a composer whose beliefs are barely discussed by his biographers. In analytical and musicological studies there is a sharp disconnect, as the spiritual element is either ignored or misunderstood. Regardless of a scholar’s own conclusions as to the validity of the relation of spirituality and music making, failing to give the subject proper credence, at the very least, bypasses the composer’s own belief about the centrality of spirituality in his work. It is quite common to consider a composer’s culture, historical era, historical events, and personal relationships, to name a few, when determining the influence of externals upon a composer’s music. Just as journalists struggle in their treatment of Rivera’s spiritual narrative and it’s place in accounting for his extraordinary talent, music writers also curtail their attention to the religious claims of their subjects.

This dissertation studies how religious conversions can provide a stimulus for the creation of unique music, reflecting the new and meaningful circumstances in the personal and spiritual lives of composers. Arvo Pärt, John Coltrane, and Franz Liszt, who represent different historical epochs and musical genres, are used as case
studies. Their music will be considered alongside the spiritual narratives that each composer renders as he accounts for his new work brought about after a religious conversion.

Although I do not expect to make sweeping claims or devise a rigid theory as to how all composers who share impacting spiritual commitments respond in the wake of a religious conversion, I will highlight a few interesting parallels between these artists, their new creative processes, the resultant sound of their new music, and the intent for the usage and presentation of their work. Coinciding with new spiritual and personal identities, a kind of artistic derailment occurs, sending our composers off to find new methods of working that reconciles their spiritual identities with their music, fusing the two in meaningful ways into their new work.

In all of the cases addressed, a noticeable musical change did indeed occur in the post-conversion work of these composers. Once these methods become established, a prolific period typically ensues, and in some cases, drastic changes are manifest in the harmonic languages and intent for the performances of these pieces. Furthermore, a unique approach to composing is illuminated in studying these three composers. The Song of the Convert is born out of the creative and religious space where each composer abandons a previously established musical system and sets his course in motion to adopt a new one that accounts for spiritual reasoning.

This study begins by looking into the idea of religious conversion on its own, establishing definitions that will be used throughout the dissertation. As there are complexities to the ideas of both religion and conversion, careful treatment of each is needed, particularly if we want to be inclusive of the varied religious experiences in
the lives of our case studies. Having established an acceptable definition of *religious conversion*, our composers will be addressed in succession, including biographical narratives alongside analyses of important pieces. Finally, we close with a comparison of all three case studies, illuminating important musical similarities and compositional trends.
chapter two

the artist and religious conversion
Understanding Religious Conversion

A recent study by the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life has found that more than a quarter of American adults (28%) have left one religion in favor of another, or have given up on religion altogether. “If change in affiliation from one type of Protestantism to another is included, roughly 44% of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether.”\(^\text{18}\) The survey concludes that “constant movement characterizes the American religious marketplace, as every major religious group is simultaneously gaining and losing adherents.”\(^\text{19}\)

The Pew study is very inclusive and careful in avoiding such jargon as the word *conversion*. In this manner the study is able to more broadly describe all aspects of religious change by referring to them as *change in religious affiliation*. Perhaps the researchers are aware that there are popular and romantic ascriptions to the word *conversion*. Although one may conceive of any change in religious affiliation as a kind of conversion, the romanticized image emphasizes a troubled soul who, after an epiphany, is dramatically converted to a new religious faith. Stories of a kind of “I found God” scenario are quite common in the West. One popular example of this *epiphany paradigm* is Martin Luther’s conversion account where a dramatic religious experience provided the foundation for him to develop


\(^{19}\) *ibid.* p.7
his theology, ultimately compelling him to the nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses in 1517.\textsuperscript{20} A modern day example of the “I found God” scenario is well documented by Charles Colson, who was public about his conversion during the fall of the Nixon administration, of which he was a top official.\textsuperscript{21} Colson received much criticism from national press and from those suspicious that he was using his conversion as a way of painting a more altruistic example of himself during a time of scrutiny and a public legal battle.\textsuperscript{22}

But there are other conversion scenarios that are common in the West, which are rather different from the \textit{epiphany paradigm}. Individuals often convert from one religious faith to another in preparation for marriage with a spouse of a different spiritual tradition. These two scenarios, the \textit{epiphany paradigm} and the \textit{family convert}, are not at all the same. The spiritual, personal, and psychological processes involved in each case are quite distinct, and the steps that lead to conversion are not at all alike. Yet the same word, \textit{conversion}, is commonly used to describe both.

The Pew study is therefore right to avoid the term \textit{conversion}. However, even \textit{change in religious affiliation} presents a problem for some communities of faith in that it fails to properly encompass many important aspects that the concept of \textit{conversion} more properly connotes. Protestant Evangelicals in the West, many of who do not emphasize an affiliation to a particular denomination, consider an

\textsuperscript{20} Marty, \textit{Martin Luther}, 2004

\textsuperscript{21} Colson, \textit{Born Again}, 1976

\textsuperscript{22} Wills, \textit{Born Again Politics}, New York Times, 1976 (this is one among many articles that is suspicious of Colson’s conversion.)
epiphany experience to be the occasion for a religious conversion. A change in affiliation or denomination is therefore merely a move from one local place of worship to another. For this group of religious observers, conversion is the admission to their faith and change of affiliation is not at all analogous. There is simply no good term or classification that will encapsulate inclusively the ways that all communities of faith perceive its rise and fall in membership.

The point here is not to blame the Pew study for its lack of inclusion or to brand their research as false, but rather to suggest how difficult it is to define religious change in a manner that is all-encompassing. “Indeed, conversion is a highly confusing and controversial issue today largely because the term ‘conversion’ refers not to one reality but to an enormously wide range of very different human realities.” Different cultures, religious traditions, and historical epochs have all understood conversion in such a variety of ways. Today, it is imperative to classify which interpretation of conversion is utilized in any discussion where the concept is central.

One is tempted, then, to turn to academic study of the concept of conversion in order to ascertain some harmony on the matter. However, no agreement can be found among the academic disciplines that would satisfy all parties who lay claim to just what a conversion is and what its attributes are. Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and historians all have different explanations. These descriptions

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23 Graham, Billy, How to be Born Again, 1989
24 Conn, Christian Conversion, p.7
25 Morrison, Understanding Conversion, p.xiv
differ so widely that one cannot be certain whether all parties are referring to the same phenomenon. Here are some examples:

American philosopher, William James, describes conversion as “the process, gradual or sudden by which a self hitherto divided, consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.”26 A theologian describes conversion as a “radical change of heart and life.” 27 Another theologian writes, “By conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of the individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right.” 28 Finally, Sigmund Freud classifies conversion as a “coping device with the goal of guilt resolution, hostility management, and the identification of a person with the father figure.” 29

While James emphasizes a consciousness element as impetus for conversion, the theologians emphasize the soul or heart. As might be expected, theological scholars offer more mysterious explanations. Freud attempts to find a non-theological explanation that leaves no room for the possibility of the spiritual element being a reality. One gets the sense that no group out of the three will find a

26 James, William, Varieties of Religious Experience, p.157
27 Kriebel, Conversion and Religious Experience, p.7
28 Nock, Conversion, p.6-7
29 Freud, A religious experience, 1928; Rambo, Current research on Religious Conversion, p.155
way to agree on an understanding of *conversion* that will satisfy the others. James and Freud are at odds with the *conscious* and *subconscious*, and the theologians are at odds with both James and Freud in the possibility of mystery and the metaphysical.

Historians, on the other hand, know better than to provide just one definition for conversion. “It is a confusion of categories to use the word ‘conversion’ as though it were an instrument of critical analysis, equally important to any culture or religion. The word has a profound, mystical sense in the West for which some of the great religions and languages have no equivalent. Even in the history of the West, it has displayed different connotations at different times.”

While consulting scholars to weigh in on classifying conversion, we may also hold our findings up against actual conversion experiences. This litmus test is useful to determine if there can be any harmony between the convert and the scholar. One convert writes: “I find it difficult to explain what did happen. I expect that the easiest thing is to say that suddenly SOMETHING WAS. My whole soul was cleft clean by it, as a silk veil slit by a shining sword. And then *I knew*. I do not know now what I knew. I remember, I didn’t know even then. That is, I didn’t *know* with any “faculty.” It was not in my mind or heart or blood stream. But whatever it was I knew, it was something that made ENORMOUS SENSE. And it was final.”

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30 Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*, p.xiv

31 Claire Boothe Luce, who was a writer, scholar, and the first woman elected to the U.S Congress. This passage was excerpted from: Kerr/Mulder, *Conversions*, p.249
Another convert writes: "The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing. God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds, and the blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind."

As touching as these two conversion descriptions may be, they bring no harmony with the academy in finding a consensus as to what conversion is. These individuals are examples of converts who are also noted for their own work in scholarship, but even they, regardless of having had the experience, are at a loss to classify or describe the phenomenon in language that makes it possible to form a concrete academic understanding. In fact, the converts place more of an emphasis on mystery and the metaphysical than even the theologians.

Indeed, one who considers all of these definitions and classifications may form a preference for one or two over the others, but we would all have to agree that no consensus is found to satisfy every camp. And even if we accept religious converts’ input as authoritative there is very little consensus among all communities of faith. Conversion has a particular meaning in Western culture in a way that Islam, for example, has no linguistic parallel. “Arabic has no equivalent for the mysterious inwardness of change connoted by ‘conversion.’ To adhere to Islam is ‘to follow the right way,’ meaning formal observance.”

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32 Jonathan Edwards, Personal Narrative, p.61
33 Morrison, Understanding Conversion, p.6
While recognizing the complexities, for the purpose of this discourse on religious conversion and composers, I will yield to one scholar's concept of the word, as it is primarily inclusive of all three of our case studies. “The term religious conversion ... describes an experience of increased devotion within the same religious framework, a shift from no religious commitment to a devout religious life, or a change from one religious affiliation to another.” 34 As we will discover in the next three chapters, Liszt’s conversion was what Ullman describes as “increased devotion within the same religious framework,” 35 while Pärt’s experience falls within a “change from one affiliation to another,” and Coltrane’s conversion is a shift from “no religious commitment to a devout religious life.”

Now that I have established a definition for religious conversion appropriate to the discussion of composers who have experienced one, the remainder of this chapter will be concerned with four things that will help us understand the narratives of our case studies. First, I will explore the varieties of religious conversion experiences that are common. Secondly, I will discuss the personal changes that occur as a result of a conversion. Thirdly, I will address how a religious conversion affects an artist and his/her work. And finally, from all of the findings in this chapter, I will establish a methodology to examine our case studies in successive chapters.

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34 Ullman, Transformed self: the psychology of religious conversion, p.191

35 As chapter 3 on Arvo Pärt provides a more detailed assessment of the composer’s narrative, we will address how Pärt may actually sit somewhere between all three of Ullman’s distinctions, as they all describe as aspect of his experience.
Common Conversion Experiences

Although the epiphany paradigm is the popular assumption for a conversion experience, many conversion narratives describe a more gradual process; a spiritual journey rather than an instant, dramatic intervention. The gradual process, for many converts, can take several years to lead to one's conversion. Some converts even profess, while looking back on their spiritual development, that they were not aware of a particular moment when their conversion occurred. Christian literature and sacred artistic renderings of traditional religious stories depict both of these paradigms: the epiphany and the gradual. For example, artistic works on the subjects of St. Paul and Augustine of Hippo’s conversions are plentiful in Western history. Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus is reported to include a blinding visitation from Christ, whereas Augustine’s is understood to have taken years of searching, spiritual leading, and careful thought. These two conversion experiences are often paired together in order to demonstrate the duality of the

36 Some examples in literature of the gradual conversion narrative:

Edwards, Jonathan, Personal Narrative, Holte, p.80
Merton, Thomas, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1948
Rice, Anne, Called out of Darkness, 2008, p.139, 190
Colson, Charles, Born Again, 1976
Lamott, Ann, Traveling Mercies, 2000

37 Cogley, John, A Canterbury Tale, Holte, p.32
39 Augustine of Hippo, Confessions
ways that individuals find faith. Of our case studies, Coltrane’s conversion is like the *epiphany* conversion, where Pärt’s is perhaps an example of a *gradual* convert.

**Personal Changes**

A significant personal change that occurs after a conversion is the adoption of a new *worldview*. The term has been floating around for over a century, beginning first with philosophers, and today, it commonly means something akin to Schelling’s definition: “self realized, productive as well as conscious way of apprehending and interpreting the universe of beings.” Simply put, worldviews are answers to life’s big questions. “Is there a god? What is the purpose for humanity? How did the world come into existence?” etc. Most individuals espouse some *worldview* that either answers these questions, or deals with them by considering certain questions unanswerable. Upon a conversion, the answers to many of these questions change as the convert forms a new *worldview*.

**Artists and Conversion**

For the artist, a religious conversion reaches further than the adoption of a new worldview. Our three composers saw their artistic working methods re-invented after their conversions, and in all cases, conversion led to drastic changes in style and form. In the first chapter, I mentioned other composers who also underwent such changes musically as a result of a conversion. (Stravinsky, Tavener, Glass, Scelsi) After Leo Tolstoy’s conversion to Christianity, he refused to write

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40 Kerr, *Conversions*, p.xiii

41 Naugle, *Worldview*, p.60
what he considered mere fiction and instead tried to communicate his faith through religious articles and in what he hoped would be seen as moral works of art.”  

T.S. Elliot, too, converted mid-career and began to incorporate his faith into his work.  

Recently, Anne Rice, author of *Interview of the Vampire* and many other popular novels converted to Roman Catholicism and found that, for her, the subject matter of her work must change to include the new aspects of her faith. The experience of a religious conversion, for artists, many of whom are used to depositing their personal lives into their work, forces a consideration of new forms, intent, and content of their art. Upon conversion, an artist asks worldview-like questions about his/her work and develops new answers to replace the old methods, thereby resulting in the new forms. This *artistic worldview* includes questions like: “What is the purpose of my art? For whom is it intended? How is it that I came to be endowed with the ability to create? What form should my art take?”

Tolstoy, for example, found it necessary to write an entire book exploring his *artistic worldview* after his conversion in *What Is Art?* The book often takes on more of a manifesto-like quality that was so radical to some readers and to the Russian government that it was censored and banned. One *artistic worldview* question that Tolstoy asks in the book is: “What is this art which is considered so important and necessary for humanity that for its sake these sacrifices of labor, of human life, and

42 Kerr, *Conversions*, p.133-134

43 Elliot, T.S., *Ash Wednesday*, 1930, Kerr, p.xvii

44 Rice, Anne, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, 2006
even of goodness may be made?"45 One answer to his question, among many
provided in his book, can be found on the final page and it demonstrates his shift in
*artistic worldview*. “The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of
reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in being
united together, and to set up in place of the existing reign of force that kingdom of
God, i.e., of love, which we all recognize to be the highest aim of human life.”46

When studying the religious conversions of artists we have one more
resource at our disposal: the art itself. As one conversion scholar points out the
importance in understanding religious conversion through narratives
(autobiographies, letters, etc.), the artist provides one more place where their
spirituality is deposited, and this place is quite different from the narrative form.
“Through [works of art], experience is translated into expression. The difference
between experience and recollection, in the mind or artistic forms, is important.”
“Thus, for us understanding conversion through works of art actually means
understanding the recollections embalmed in their work, rather than the living
event of conversion.”47 Another scholar echoes this view that artistic
representations of conversion and the analyses of these works are useful when
paired with historic and sociological research. “...religious conversion is a mystery
enshrined in public history, and ...if historical and sociological research is

45 Tolstoy, Leo, *What is Art?*, p.16
46 *ibid*, p.191
47 Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, p.2
fundamental to analyze the context of religious conversion, its personal features are better illustrated through semiotic analysis of stories and representations.”

**Methodology**

In the next three chapters, I will explore three case studies of composers who have experienced a religious conversion: Arvo Pärt, John Coltrane, and Franz Liszt. I am looking to determine how a religious conversion affects the music of these composers and if there is anything particularly unique about their voice as convert composers. I will take a three-step approach in analyzing each case study.

1) Respectfully construct a conversion narrative from sources of each composer (letters, essays, interviews, autobiographies, etc.). This step will utilize a biographical approach to understanding the meaning of the conversion in the composers’ life.

2) Investigate how the composers’ *artistic worldview* was changed after the conversion. In other words, study the changes in the composers’ perceived purpose of his/her music. For many composers, these changes take years to become manifest in the musical process.

3) Analyze the changes in compositional process or style and the overall approach to music making. This step will be the most substantial, as it requires significant score study of a wide body of works that are quintessential examples of music written before and after conversion.

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48 Leone, *Religious Conversion and Identity*, p.3
One final issue must be addressed before proceeding. My analyses of the composers who I have chosen as case studies, and the religious faiths that they have all chosen, will be dealt with in a manner that makes no judgment or assumption. Scholarship on the topic of conversions, as explained above, is quite often too transparent as to the particular leanings of the author. A religious writer researches from a perspective that presents religious conversions as a possible reality and a non-religious author often applies skepticism in analyzing the spiritual lives and decisions of their subjects. My approach will be both inclusive and hermeneutical; discovering the meaning of faith and conversion for the artist and accepting it as a possible reality without laying a stamp of skepticism on top of it or coloring the subject with a different crayon.
chapter three

Arvo Pärt: clean slate
Derailment

In the previous chapter, the topic of religious conversion was discussed in detail. We unpacked a working definition of the word conversion that is relevant to the composers studied in this dissertation, as well as general observations that pertain to art and the important connections between new work created after a significant personal and spiritual change.

The next three chapters are case studies of composers who have experienced a religious conversion that has had a significant midcareer impact on the artists’ creative output. Although each of our case studies is quite different, spanning several historical eras in western music and representing contrasting styles and theologies, there are some similarities in the conversion narratives and in the new musical approaches that took shape. For each of our three composers, a conversion led to a turning away from preceding creative approaches, and beginning a quest to establish a new form of music that is somehow consistent with the profound personal change. It’s as if the artist was once in motion on a set of tracks, but wavering at a point where flaws in the tracks threatened to throw the locomotive off. The conversion, and all of the personal changes that come with it, is the moment of derailment. But mere freedom was never the goal for the artists’ derailment. The artist only felt at home when a new set of tracks was laid and motion could be set again.

49 “conversion ... describes an experience of increased devotion within the same religious framework, a shift from no religious commitment to a devout religious life, or a change from one religious affiliation to another.” (Ullman, p.191)
All three of our case studies followed this model. A quest began with the conversion, forcing the composer to search for a new music; shaking the foundations of the old working method, as well as the form and intent of the work. Our composers spent years afterwards searching for this new sound and establishing logical systems that justify the art with the new person.

The first of our three case studies is Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt (b.1935). As we will study see, Pärt’s conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church resulted in a drastic change in style and harmonic language, the overall presentation of his music, and the techniques employed in the process of creating his work. Upon discovering his new rails, Pärt set out to accomplish an alternative to traditional tonal musical conventions in his new work. He established a style that eschews the past with a sound only capable of being formed in modernity. Pärt’s new music needed to take shape in a manner that reconciled his newly adopted Orthodox life, which came packaged with a long and rich tradition that he resonated with in meaningful ways. After several trials to form a new sound and approach, Pärt established a logical system for composing his new work, as well as an entirely new body of compositions that were the result of an outpouring occurring within a span of only a few years.

**Arvo Pärt and Soviet Estonia**

Following World War II, Stalin had been establishing new puppet governments and policies in the Eastern bloc and the Baltic States after the liberation of German occupation. The cultural climate in Estonia, which had
formerly fought for independence from Russian rule in 1939, was conflicted with the benefit of liberation from the Nazi regime only to find itself under foreign occupation once again. Stalin and his communist government had targeted dissenting political, religious, and artistic voices as his policies took a hardline approach to those who appeared to be out of sync with the Soviet party. In July of 1949, three of Estonia’s five most prominent professional conductors were deported when they were branded as “enemies of the state.”

Stalin’s last attempt to purge the Baltic states of “bourgeois nationalists” in 1950 led to the deportation of 30,000-80,000 politicians, farmers, religious leaders, and artists in Estonia.

Post-Stalin Soviet Estonia was an era of redefining principals and policies. While focusing on maintaining Communist ideals, the USSR began letting up on some of the more inhumane treatment of dissenting voices. The post-Stalinist era was characterized by a cessation of such tactics. Still fresh in the minds of some creative writers was the severe censorship of works of literature, leading to a remarkably small contribution among those who remained in Estonia. As artists struggled to redefine themselves during the thaw occurring between 1955 and 1968, hardline Stalinist policies were still fresh in the memories of those who had lived through it. Although artistic and dissenting voices were monitored, the thaw began a decade that fostered a surge in new literature, theater, film, and music.

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50 *ibid.*, p. 187
51 Raun, p. 171
52 *ibid.*, p. 186
53 *ibid.*, p. 173
Modernism was branded as western art, deemed not appropriate for the Soviet society, but forms that drew upon Baltic and Soviet culture were acceptable and welcomed.\(^\text{54}\)

Immediately following Stalin’s death, a religious revival emerged in Estonia, where church membership and religious activity grew at a rate that alarmed the Communist party.\(^\text{55}\) Under Stalin, state sponsored religion was allowed to exist, but not without restriction.\(^\text{56}\) Stalin’s policies put religious institutions on state surveillance and led to public discrimination and loss of social benefits for important religious leaders.\(^\text{57}\) The spread of religion was prohibited, as religious literature was banned.\(^\text{58}\) Marxist theory assumed that, in time, religion would simply disappear as socialism developed. The revival of religious activity following Stalin’s death was likely an expression of religious believers who had felt uncomfortable with public association during Stalin’s rule and who were now presented with an opportunity to make their religious allegiance official. Though the new government let up on many of the hardline policies, it was skeptical of the religious movement, which led to a campaign by the Kremlin to exert control over

\(^\text{54}\) ibid., p. 186
\(^\text{55}\) ibid., p. 218
\(^\text{56}\) O'Connor, p. 28
\(^\text{57}\) ibid., p. 35
\(^\text{58}\) Raun, p. 218
religious institutions. As a result, religious activity, in the form of recorded religious ceremonies,\(^{59}\) declined sharply in the years that followed.\(^{60}\)

Among the younger generation, the Soviet religious policy was successful in obscuring the relevance of religious institutions for a few reasons. First, despite Stalin’s death and a new era of Communism, the Soviet government was seemingly as strong as ever.\(^ {61}\) Second, a younger generation of Estonians, and the Soviet government, saw religious institutions as cultural bastions of a Baltic past. Lastly, religious voices were suppressed, even publicly persecuted, and the dissemination of religious literature was illegal. Estonian youth grew up without strong ties to the religions of their parents or ancestors, resulting in a more atheistic or non-religious cultural demographic in Baltic society.\(^ {62}\)

Arvo Pärt came of age during the thaw in Soviet Estonia after Stalin’s death. Like many,\(^ {63}\) Pärt’s parents identified themselves as belonging to the Estonian Lutheran Church, but Arvo has indicated that they were “not really church-goers” or particularly religious.\(^ {64}\) As a child, he studied music privately at the Tallinn Music Secondary School before entering the Tallinn Conservatory in 1957, where his composition teacher was Heino Eller. Pärt’s years at the Conservatory provided

\(^{59}\) Marriage ceremonies, baptisms, membership vows, etc.

\(^{60}\) Raun, p. 218

\(^{61}\) O’Connor, p. 29

\(^{62}\) ibid., p. 53

\(^{63}\) ibid., p. 35

\(^{64}\) Phone Interview, 10/26/2010
him with some exposure to music by contemporary western composers, particularly Arnold Schoenberg and John Cage. Although the availability of scores and recordings of modern music outside of the Soviet Union was limited, Pärt began to adopt serial techniques in his own way in some of his early compositions as a professional composer. Notably, *Nekrolog, op. 5* (1960) for orchestra, was the first serialist piece written by an Estonian composer, and it gained the composer a reputation that was somewhat notorious.\(^{65}\)

Today, Pärt seems to have no connection to *Nekrolog* or to his early music, which he describes as “noisy.”\(^{66}\) Throughout most of the 1960’s, Pärt explored serialism and other modernist techniques. His music from this period displays virtuosity, imagination, and a strong grasp of the avant-garde aesthetic that characterized the art world in Europe and the US. In the years between 1960-8, Pärt composed several large-form works, including two symphonies: the first employing serial techniques, and the other adding to the fray a Cage-inspired approach to chance and juxtaposition. He established himself as an emerging and innovative voice in a region where the cutting-edge was not welcomed or encouraged.

While making a name for himself as a forward-looking composer, Pärt was equally active in writing music for film, which included several scores for feature length productions by Estonian filmmakers. A 1965 feature titled, *Mäeküla Pilnamees*, is a dark film with an ominous sounding score. Pärt uses pizzicato string

\(^{65}\) Hillier, p. 36

\(^{66}\) Kimberley, p. 14
textures throughout that give the sense of intermittent rain. At times, the composer allows short moments of atonality to provide a jarring atmosphere mixed with extended string techniques. The overall score evokes Bernard Hermann’s more characteristic passages, while also utilizing leitmotif, which was typical for film music during this time. A 1973 feature-length production, *Ukuaru*, finds Pärt utilizing folk music elements throughout the score, while also using the orchestra in a more traditional manner. His use of short, 4 to 5 note motives, which reappear throughout, often remind the listener of Shostakovich’s DSCH motive.

Although his works were performed throughout the Soviet Union, his music was drawing sharp criticism by prominent Soviet composers and academic circles as being associated with Western formalism. Some of his earlier atonal pieces were banned by the Union of Soviet Composers for utilizing Western serialist techniques, and some of his more publicized works employed collâge and chance techniques that were frowned upon. In the beginning of *Symphony no. 2*, the percussion section begins with a choir of children’s squeaky toys as atonal textures are layered in the strings. Not only were his pieces considered absurd by his critics, but Pärt seemed to have an enhanced platform on which to display them, which angered many.

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67 Mäeküla Pilnamees, Leida Laius, Tallinnfilm, 1965
68 *Ukuaru*, Leida Laius, Tallinnfilm, 1973
69 Hillier, p. 36
70 *ibid.*, p. 53
71 *ibid.*, p. 36
In 1968, more restrictions were lifted by the Soviet government allowing religious institutions to speak openly about religion and the past infringements by the USSR. This lift led to a stir in open religious activity in the Baltic States, where religious leaders felt empowered to speak out for changes in the political landscape. Several religious denominations petitioned the government for new rights and protections from the state. In Lithuania, the Catholic Church was the forerunner of such political-religious activity, led in many instances by empowered youth. Estonia saw similar movements by several religious institutions, including Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish observers. The Estonian Catholic Church, a minority faith, saw an influx of young artists, which led to increased membership in local congregations. Estonian religious observers on all fronts began to speak out and form ideas about what it meant to hold beliefs openly in Soviet society.

In this same year, Arvo Pärt composed an orchestra piece with soloists and choir that challenged Soviet prohibitions on public decrees of religious sentiment. *Credo* (1968) for piano soloist, chorus, and orchestra, is a bold setting of portions of the Gospel of Matthew that begins with a loud statement that translates, “I believe in God the Father Almighty.” While today’s impression of such a statement may not be very striking at all, publically professing religious sentiment in a state sponsored concert hall was still illegal and cause for censure. *Credo* was banned throughout Soviet Union the next week, soon after it was given an encore performance in Tallinn. While Pärt has stated that he had no intention of being provocative, the conductor of the orchestra, Neeme Jarvi, seemed to understand the magnitude of the

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72 O’Connor, p. 53
piece and the public reaction by the state. Jarvi was careful to avoid the channels that were required of a concert premiere, which entailed receiving permission from the Union of Soviet Composers. Knowing that the piece would never be approved, the conductor performed the work without approval, feeling confident that since he was one of only a few trained orchestral conductors in Estonia, he would not be deported.73

*Credo* appears to be a kind of transition piece for Pärt. It is a mixture of common-practice western tonality with atonality and modernism using excerpts from Bach’s C Major prelude from the Anna Magdelena book. Some scholars see this piece as evidence of Pärt struggling with his musical language as he takes a step in the direction of reinvention.74 Symbolically, *Credo* consists of two themes that represent good and evil with the text providing the program in highlighting the Christian concepts of sin and forgiveness.

Aside from the musical transition that is implied in *Credo*, the religious significance points to Pärt’s spiritual change that culminated soon after in his conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church. Jarvi described Pärt at the time of composing *Credo* as a “religious person,” and the piece is the composer’s first work that deals with religious sentiment. It is also his first serious work to include voice. Regardless of the political or spiritual statement that Pärt intended for *Credo*, if any, the aftermath of its ban and the musical and spiritual direction of his work and personal life resulted in a period of creative silence. This silence was in part self-

73 Kimberley, p. 15
74 Hillier, p. 74-6
imposed, as the composer reevaluated his work, its intent, and his relevance as a Soviet cultural figure. But the silence was also in part mandated by the state, which banned publishing, purchasing, and new commissions of the composer’s music. Pärt was deeply affected by this ban, as it brought him to the point of serious physical illness.

**Artistic Reform and a Silenced Composer**

Pärt’s creative silence occurred during a tense, but exciting period of reform, where Estonian citizens were struggling to understand what role the state, religion, and art played in its culture. At the prospect of openly expressing their beliefs, religious institutions were asserting their place in Baltic society. Artists felt the Soviet grip loosen on certain restrictions on artistic form and content, which brought about a flood of new art in all arenas. And a young Baltic generation, whose identity had been manipulated by Marxist theories, was faced with a new sense of liberty, limited though it was, to explore the cultural histories of their parents and grandparents. Yet while these changes defined the social climate in 1968, Pärt was dealing with his imposed silence, the public ban on his music, and criticism that labeled his art as aligned with *bourgeois nationalism.*

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75 Hillier, p. 199-20

Although the noted restrictions were enforced by the state, public performances were not banned. Pärt was kept from attending many performances outside Estonia, however.

76 *ibid.*, p. 32

77 *ibid.*, p. 119
However, the silent period between 1969-76 was not entirely void of creative work. Pärt continued to work as a film composer, which paid his salary, and he also composed two rather large-form orchestral works. But as Paul Hiller points out, if we allot one year apiece to the two concert works, it is still reasonable to consider these years for Pärt as being mostly “silent.”

The two concert works that Pärt composed and published in this era are transitional in form and harmonic language. *Symphony No. 3* (1971) is a piece that adopts traditional tonality and draws its melodic approach from plainchant. Although the composer demonstrates a solid move away from the avant-garde aesthetic and into a firmly planted tonal language, his music that would be developed later would further abandon the modernist techniques current during this time, as well as this particular brand of tonal harmony that Pärt was making use of.

**Conversion Narrative**

For the Pärts, more significant changes took place during the years of creative silence. Arvo’s wife, Nora, at the beginning of the 1970’s converted from Judaism to the Russian Orthodox Church. Arvo followed shortly after, and he credits Nora with guidance in his conversion during this time. Although the Pärts prefer to remain private about many of the personal details pertaining to their conversion and entrance into the ROC, Arvo indicates that the beginnings included prayer,

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78 *ibid.,* p. 65
79 Serialist and colláge techniques
80 Lubow, p. 4
meditation, and readings from traditional Orthodox Christian literature. In adopting
the Orthodox life and practices, Pärt has said that he particularly resonated with the
writings of the Desert Church Fathers of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries CE. He was
drawn to these writings by their traditional origins, having been written by pre-
Christiandom era monks in Syria, Greece, and Northern Africa. Their simple, yet
mysterious tenets are meaningful and challenging to Pärt even today, and
throughout his life as an Orthodox believer, he has continued to return to these texts
for meditation and inspiration.\textsuperscript{81} Another important spiritual text that was
meaningful to Pärt as he entered the ROC was the \textit{Great Canon of Repentance} by St.
Andrew of Crete, written in the 7th century.\textsuperscript{82} This lengthy work is used today in
Orthodox worship and it includes daily prayers, recitations, readings, and practices
that are performed for a total of 40 days during the season of Lent.\textsuperscript{83} In practicing
the \textit{Canon}, Pärt journeyed through a range of religious materials on the subject of
repentance and redemption, presenting the composer with an analogous structure
for what would occur in his artistic endeavors; beginning anew with a Tabula Rasa,
or blank slate.

When Pärt emerged from his silence in 1976, he had developed an entirely
new kind of music that was quite different than the transitional works that he
published during the silent period. His new music shows a composer who was
interested in returning back to the origins of classical music to reinvent new

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[81]{Phone Interview 10/26/10}
\footnotetext[82]{Schelbert, liner notes, \textit{Kanon Pokajanen}, ECM}
\footnotetext[83]{see \textit{Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete}}
\end{footnotes}
alternatives to the conventions that were set in motion at this important crossroads in music history. Within two years of re-entering the fold, Pärt established an entirely new catalog of works, a consistent artistic voice, and a logically constructed compositional system. Where the composer previously wrote music that had little to do with his personal convictions, he would now claim that his new music had much to do with his faith and the traditions that are involved in its daily practice.84

**Pärt’s New Creative Process**

Pärt was anything but idle during his silence, as he filled up notebooks with exercises and ideas for pieces, some of which would become published works that we are familiar with today. These exercises ran the gamut from traditional workings in harmony and counterpoint to abstract notational experiments of the sonic motion of a flying bird.85 Inasmuch as Pärt used early classical music as a guide for his new compositional process, he credits spiritual writings and prayer as the most influential component in his development of his new style. While forming his musical style, Pärt would often read a passage from a text and then immediately write, using important tenants from the text as his guide.86 Below is one passage...

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84 Hillier, p. 68

McCarthy, p. 64

Owens, p. 403

85 Lubow, p. 2

86 ibid., p. 74
from the Desert Church Fathers that typifies the kind of religious literature that the composer may have resonated with.

“Once Arsenius came to a place where there was a bed of reeds shaken by the wind. He said to the brothers, ‘What is this rustling noise?’ They said, ‘It is the reeds.’ He said to them, ‘If a man sits in silence and hears the voice of a bird, he does not have quiet in his heart; how much more difficult is it for you, who hear the sound of these reeds?’” ⁸⁷

Some important descriptions provide windows into the more mysterious or mystical qualities that Pärt attributes to being influential on his new sound. He has stated “in living an Orthodox life, music flows from me.” ⁸⁸ Nora Pärt has said that the composer has “learned everything he knows from the Church Fathers.” ⁸⁹

Although Nora’s statement may be oversimplified, it indeed points to just how central spiritual activity is in Pärt’s compositional process. Ideas and influences that change an artist’s life alter the very form and intent of the creative work. One result of these meditative exercises was Pärt’s new sensitivity to delicate sound, unnoticed prior to his period of creative silence. ⁹⁰ As the passage in the Desert Church Fathers seems to suggest hearing subtleties or absent layers of ambient sound, Pärt begins to hear his surrounding world through this aural filter. In a quiet landscape, the composer began dealing with sound with acute awareness, and it was enough for

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⁸⁷ Desert Fathers, p. 9
⁸⁸ Phone Interview 10/26/10
⁸⁹ Owens, p. 402
⁹⁰ Hillier, p. 74
him to consider still, natural white noise, tonal resonance, or the sustained sound of
a bell as interesting textures that have merit an intrigue in their simplicity. His
aesthetic is similar in this regard to Morton Feldman and Giocconto Scelsi, who
seemed to appreciate an equal level of interest in ambient surroundings.

The subject matter of Pärt’s new compositions point to personal and spiritual
changes brought about by his conversion and entry into the Russian Orthodox
Church. At first, since Credo and his earlier music had been banned in the Soviet
Union, the composer felt compelled to conceal the spiritual content or text that his
works were based on. For example, In Spe (1976) is a vocal composition that was
conceived as a setting of the Kyrie in the Latin mass, but the content was concealed
by replacing the Latin lyrics with simple i, o, and e melisma vowels. The composer
years later revealed that a passage of scripture was deeply relevant to him as he
wrote In Spe, which is Psalm 137. In a later revision of the work (1984), after the
Pärt’s had left the Soviet Union, In Spe was renamed to reveal its original content, An
den Wassern zu Babel sassen wir und weinten, which is the first line taken from the
Psalm. The message of the work is not only spiritual in nature, but also political.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars
we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?

91 Other works from this time were similarly concealed and renamed later, such as
Sarah was Ninety Years Old (1976), which was originally titled Modus, as the original
is programmatic and based on a Biblical story.

92 Hillier, p. 98-9
If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand forget its skill.  
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem  
my highest joy.93

The Psalm is written from the perspective of a captive community that longs for the freedom and joy of former times, which is rather like the Soviet occupation of Estonia. The “tormenters” in the poem require music of a particular kind that masks the true feelings of the captive community, paralleling Pärt’s and other Soviet composers’ sufferings under the state. As the artist in the poem is unable to sing the “songs of joy,” which evoke a time without suffering, Pärt likewise felt compelled to conceal his writing and study of a kind of music that embodied such joy and aspects of his faith in the Soviet Union.94 The Hebrew poem finds the “tormenters” asking for the songs of old, which are joyful religious songs. In the case of the Soviet Union, the kinds of songs required were also songs of joy, but not of the religious kind. Pärt therefore conceals the message and its text in the 1977 version titled In Spe. The original title is Latin, meaning “in hope, or longing for the future.”

*Tabula Rasa* (1977) is a concerto for two violins that draws its title from the Christian concept of redemption and renewal. As already established, the *Great Canon of Repentance* by St. Andrew of Crete, was important to the composer in the

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93 Psalm 137:1-6 (NIV)

94 see footnote #91
Hillier, p. 98-102
forming of his Orthodox life. *Tabula Rasa* is a similar evocation of spiritual renewal.\(^{95}\)

*Fratres* (1977) is another work that conceals its content, as it appears to be inspired by the writings of the Desert Church Fathers. In Latin, the Desert Church Fathers are commonly referred to as *fratres peregrinos*, which translates: “pilgrim brethren.” Upon leaving the Soviet Union in 1980, the composer did not alter the title of this work, which had already become widely performed.

**Tintinnabuli Composition and the Development of a Style**

Pärt’s harmonic language had changed significantly. In his youth, his compositions made use of serial techniques, followed by collage methods of composing similar to John Cage. At the point of entering the Russian Orthodox Church, Pärt had already been turned on to Gregorian Chant, becoming very interested in the construction of simple melodies that are mostly diatonic and stepwise. His *Symphony No. 3*, composed during a break from his creative silence, made use of chant-like melodic material, as well as counterpoint and harmony typical of composers such as Shostakovich or Bartok. But Pärt continued to search for a new compositional method that would somehow reconcile all of his new musical and spiritual changes. This quest culminated in 1976 with a style that he latter named *Tintinnabulation*.\(^{96}\)

\(^{95}\) Schelbert, liner notes, *Kanon Pokajanen*, ECM

\(^{96}\) The word *Tintinnabulation* is derived from a kind of wind chime found in ancient Rome called a Tintinnabulum. Pärt adopts this image to describe his new music, which consists of alternating static and sonorous pitches, like the ancient chimes.
Pärt’s new music is not traditionally tonal – at least in the classical, common-practice understanding of tonality. It is also not traditionally sacred music, modal, or minimalistic. His new music borrows features from tonality, modality, sacred music and minimalism, but it is a unified system that works together consistently and systematically. Where some composers today may blend styles in a way that streams through musical traditions like changing channels on a radio dial, Pärt’s work takes key features from these styles and offers alternatives to their established rules. His new music develops slowly, unfolding throughout the course of a piece in a clear and logical way to the listener. It evokes images of the sacred at times, especially where sacred text is set, but it usually does not serve the function as music for religious ceremony. It is modern concert music that asks the listener to imagine a landscape that is timeless and metaphysical. The harmony is comprised of major and minor sonorities that resonate with deliberate stasis and restraint. Frequently, the listener is taken by the sheer simplicity and slowness of the music, creating a level of significant intensity.

Pärt’s new musical language contains all of the features that Dmitri Tymoczko lists as the five components of tonality\textsuperscript{97}: conjunct melodic motion,\textsuperscript{98} acoustic consonance,\textsuperscript{99} harmonic consistency,\textsuperscript{100} limited macroharmony,\textsuperscript{101} and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{97} Tymoczko, p.4
  \item \textsuperscript{98} Melodic movement at short distances
  \item \textsuperscript{99} Consonant harmonies are preferred and used as points of musical stability
  \item \textsuperscript{100} Use of harmonies that are structurally similar to one another
  \item \textsuperscript{101} The total collection of notes heard over a moderate span of time are limited to only a small number of pitches, often around five to eight.
\end{itemize}
centricity. In using Tymoczko’s components of tonality as a rubric to compare Pärt’s music with other tonal composers, a few observations highlight Pärt’s unique voice. First, his incessant commitment to diatonicism and restraint with dissonant harmony are indications of a very strict approach to acoustic consonance. Second, Pärt’s attention to the pure resonance of simple dyads, triads, and major scales, usually set at alarmingly slow harmonic rhythms, indicates that the composer is interested in extremely limited macroharmony. By using this unique and seemingly basic approach, the harmonic movements that would normally be implied through counterpoint and chord progressions, – i.e., common-practice tonality – are drained of their significance to the point where the ear no longer issues a requirement of musical lines to behave a certain way. Where common-practice tonality implies particular melodic and harmonic movement, Pärt’s language circumvents these expectations through several defining compositional devices that will be looked at below.

In describing his new music, Pärt provides the analogy of a bell, or a group of bells, where the fundamental resonance is comprised of a cluster of sophisticated, sustaining cacophony, which is attractive when focused upon. Years after emerging from his creative silence, Nora provided Arvo with the term, Tintinnabulation, to

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102 One note is heard as being more prominent than others.

103 Third-based functional harmony, or elementary tonal harmony. See Tymoczko, pp. 226-67 (Chapter 7)
describe his new music and the meditative process that is involved in composing it.104

"Tintinnabulation is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers - in my life, my music, my work. In my dark hours, I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning. The complex and many-faceted only confuses me, and I must search for unity. What is it, this one thing, and how do I find my way to it? Traces of this perfect thing appear in many guises - and everything that is unimportant falls away. Tintinnabulation is like this. Here I am alone with silence. 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, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials - with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I called it tintinnabulation."105

Among the consistent features in the earliest Tintinnabuli works (1976-8) are dual melodic voices that serve two different functions in Pärt’s compositions. The first voice is what Paul Hiller refers to as the Tintinnabuli voice. This line always consists of a static triad that grounds the tonality of each work. The second melodic voice, which is free to move about in the diatonic key of the piece, is usually heard by the listener as the main melody of each work. Frequently these two voices are attached isorhythmically, resulting in clusters of notes separated by major and

104 Hillier, p.97
105 Rodda, liner notes for Arvo Pärt Fratres, Telarc Records
minor seconds. For Pärt, these voices represent a human relationship (moving melodic diatonic voice) to the metaphysical (static triadic Tintinnabuli voice).  

“In one of our discussions about Tintinnabuli, Pärt described to me his view that the M-voice always signifies the subjective world the daily egoistic life of sin and suffering; the T-voice, meanwhile, is the objective realm of forgiveness. The M-voice may appear to wander, but is always held firmly by the T-voice. This can be likened to the eternal dualism of body and spirit, earth and heaven; but the two voices are in reality one voice, a twofold entity.”  

Tintinnabulation is grounded in compositional processes, evoking more landscape than narrative. As Symphony No. 3 had demonstrated Pärt’s command over common-practice tonal harmony and traditional counterpoint, Tintinnabuli music removes conventions of third-based functional diatonic and chromatic dominant to tonic harmony. This does not mean that voice leading and a harmonic sense of tonic are not important, but that the aural weight that ensues when harmony moves about through smooth contrary movement, which leads to chord progressions, key relationships, and conventional cadences is lifted.

Pärt’s first composition that demonstrated Tintinnabulation was Für Alina (1976), which is a short piano piece that was composed in one afternoon. The work was written as a break from other pieces that Pärt had been working on, and it represented a departure that the composer quickly gravitated to exclusively. Prior

106 Lubow, p. 5
107 Hillier, p. 96
to *Für Alina*, Pärt had been experimenting with a minimalist tonal language that is in many ways similar to Tintinnabuli in character, but is less systematic in approach.\(^ {108}\) The compositions after *Für Alina* are exhaustive explorations on the language, as Pärt pushed himself to establish his new voice in a deliberate and unified manner.

*Für Alina* is made up of the two lines of counterpoint that conveniently epitomize the simplest form of Tintinnabuli composition. The registral relationship between the *melodic* and *Tintinnabuli* voices is simple, meaning that we never have an instance of voice crossing or extreme register change as we will find in later works. In one rather unusual moment, the Tintinnabuli voice strays from its tonic triad by moving to a C# (m.11), which is the climactic moment of the work. We will not see this freedom in the compositions that follow, as the Tintinnabuli voice becomes quite strict in its relentless execution of tonic triad notes, never to include outside pitches. But what remains consistent in the works that follow *Für Alina* is the presence of one or more *melodic* voices against one or more *Tintinnabuli* lines.

\(^ {108}\) *Modus* (1976) – later renamed: *Sarah was Ninety Years Old*

*Wenn Bach Bienen gezüchtet hätte* (1976)
Example #1 – Für Alina, p.1

für alina
für klavier

Ruhig, erhoben, in sich hineinhorend

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Counterpoint and Pärt’s Musical Language

Upon establishing a compositional system with the advent of Für Alina, Arvo Pärt pushed himself to develop this newborn musical language. As the previous several years were devoted to study of both ancient music and spirituality, the composer was in the habit of returning to ancient texts for guidance. In developing Tintinnabuli composition, Pärt organized his explorations by analogy to traditional Species Counterpoint, which is a method of constructing stylistic counterpoint through a step-by-step approach, each species adding new allowances to the last.\(^{109}\) Evidence for this idea is found in the Tintinnabuli music that Pärt published in 1976-8, where each composition is focused upon narrow contrapuntal ideas in a systematic and organized manner. While I am not saying that he used the traditional regimen of species counterpoint in developing his new music, he does invent his own contrapuntal system that follows the idea of adding levels of complexity to each progressive class. Most of his early Tintinnabuli works are explorations of various classes of counterpoint, while the remaining compositions are focused on harmonic ideas. By working out his Tintinnabuli style through a step-by-step progressive approach, the composer is returning to the methods used in the development of classical music, offering alternatives to the rules and systems that became common-practice tonality. It’s as if he stood at the crossroads where these classical systems were codified and he instead offered a different path using a similar vehicle. Pärt’s Tintinnabuli compositions, in other words, are a modern

\(^{109}\) Fux, Gradus ad Parnassum
reworking of traditional diatonic music with alternative conventions governing its stylistic language.

Upon first glance at the earliest Tintinnabuli scores published in 1976-7, the notation alone demonstrates Pärt's *point-by-point* approach, which is quite similar to contrapuntal exercises in the traditional study of counterpoint.

**Example #2 – An den Wassern (1976), m. 9**
*Contrapuntal Approach, Note against Note Construction*
As we look closely at Pärt’s language and reworking of traditional forms, it may be interesting to construct a list of the composers’ contrapuntal regimen in the development in his early Tintinnabuli works. Like species counterpoint and the traditional gradual processes in 16th century counterpoint, Pärt’s appears to focus upon a particular compositional problem in isolation before proceeding to tackle another. In other words, rarely do we see an overlap in any of these contrapuntal exercises in his early Tintinnabuli works. Below is a comparison of Traditional Species Counterpoint with Pärt’s Tintinnabuli Classes Counterpoint. An interesting substitution occurs as Pärt abandons the usage of a cantus firmus, and instead replaces it with a Tintinnabuli voice present in each phrase of his new music.
Adding to the list of contrapuntal, or horizontal possibilities, other early Tintinnabuli works focus directly on the following:

- **Monody** - *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978)\(^{110}\)
- **Cannon** - *Variationen zur Gesundung von Arinuscha* (1977)\(^{111}\)
- **Mensuration Cannon** - *Arbos* (1977), and, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* (1977)\(^{112}\)

A focus on vertical composing (harmony) leads an example that is concerned with:

- **Chord Progression using Tintinnabuli Harmony** – *Fratres* (1978)

In the 20\(^{th}\) century, it is natural that a new musical language would involve alternate conceptions of counterpoint, harmony, and form. However, Pärt’s method

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\(^{110}\) As *monody* is a solo melodic voice set against an accompaniment, *Spiegel im Spiegel* follows this format with a solo voice with an arpeggiated piano accompaniment. Using a melodic process that takes 8 minutes to play out, it does not break from its approach.

\(^{111}\) The *Variationen* for solo piano explores traditional canon by a \(\frac{1}{2}\) note in the 3\(^{rd}\) and 5\(^{th}\) variations.

\(^{112}\) Following the traditional Renaissance process of mensuration canon used by Josquin and Ockeghem, *Arbos* and *Cantus* feature a melody that is played at different speeds, all layered atop one another.
required focusing in on one of the above aspects at a time, and this approach
allowed him to carefully cover all of the possibilities that might govern his language
before proceeding to combine and expand upon them. In some cases, entire works
are devoted to one contrapuntal or harmonic idea,\textsuperscript{113} and in other instances the
composer works out multiple approaches in a progressive manner. For example, in
\textit{Missa Syllabica} (1977), each of its 6 movements takes a different and systematically
more complex contrapuntal approach, adding more voices as the work progresses.
Below is a list of pieces that are devoted to or include the following contrapuntal
approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tintinabuli Classes of Counterpoint</th>
<th>Early Tintinabuli Pieces That Use this Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 1 Melodic voice against 1 Tintinabuli voice</td>
<td>\textit{Für Alina} (1976), \textit{An den wassern} (1976), \textit{Cantate Domino} (1977), \textit{Missa Syllabica} (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 2 Melodic voices against 1 Tintinabuli voice</td>
<td>\textit{Missa Syllabica} (1977) - II. Gloria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 2 Melodic voices against 2 Tintinabuli voices</td>
<td>\textit{An den wassern} (1976), \textit{Cantate Domino} (1977), \textit{Missa Syllabica} (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 2 coupled parts, each with their own Melodic and Tintinabuli voices.</td>
<td>\textit{Summa} (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Free combinations of the above techniques and other similar isolated processes (see below)</td>
<td>\textit{Tabla Rasa} (1978)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pärt’s early Tintunabuli compositions appear to cover all contrapuntal
ground from the simplest to the most complex of constructions, and they hardly
repeat these processes before exploring new possibilities. After mastering the style,
the composer allowed himself freedom to work in a more florid manner, combining
many of the contrapuntal and harmonic techniques established in his system. A
rather complex Tintinnabuli work, \textit{Tabula Rasa} (1978), is composed after these

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Für Alina}, \textit{Summa}, \textit{Fratres}, \textit{Cantus}, \textit{Arbos}, and \textit{Spiegel im Spiegel
contrapuntal possibilities had been explored. As we know that Pärt’s compositional process made use of performing exercises in his notebooks along side his daily spiritual activity, \(^ {114}\) we also recognize that though the pieces were not released in published form in order of contrapuntal complexity, but they are close enough in date to reconcile the idea that the composer made use of his notebook entries to work out contrapuntal ideas that would become published pieces.

**First Contrapuntal Class**

Looking at some examples of Pärt’s classes of counterpoint offers a glimpse into the composers’ creative process, his post-conversion working method, and the defining attributes of the Tintinnabuli style. Pärt’s first contrapuntal class, limited to one melodic voice and one Tintinnabuli voice, carefully avoids common-practice tonality in his note choices, thereby establishing an alternate language to diatonically constructed music.

Pärt’s Tintinnabuli voices are restricted to the notes of the tonic triad of the piece; Bb Major in the following example. The melodic voice is stepwise in motion and may land on notes in the corresponding diatonic scale of Bb major. The example is a two-voice passage that has strict note-against-note movement, much like traditional 1\(^{st}\) species contrapuntal phrases. Pärt’s is careful to avoid notes that would otherwise be allowed or required of common-practice tonality, avoiding any movement that would imply leading tone, functional bassline, or implied chordal harmony.

\(^ {114}\) Hillier, p. 74
The example below is a condensed version of mm. 32-42 of Cantate Domino.

The boxed notes are tonal avoidances, which usually take the form of clusters, or 2nds, in Pärt’s harmonic system. Notice how the note C in the melody, or the 2nd scale degree, is never paired with the note F in the accompaniment. Instead, the note C is always paired with a note a second scale degree away, forming a cluster harmony that implies less tonal movement. If the C is paired with an F in the Tintinnabuli voice, the latter begins to sound like a functionally tonal bassline, implying a V – I chord progression figure. Likewise, when the note Eb, or scale degree 4, appears in the melody, it is always paired with the half step neighbor D in the Tintinnabuli voice. This dyad is not typical in common-practice tonality, and it seems likely that Pärt uses it in order to avoid tonal movement. For instance, if the Eb in the melodic voice is paired with a Bb in the Tintinnabuli voice, the corresponding harmony implies a 4-3 suspension-like tonal movement. Likewise, if the Eb is paired with an F, then the harmony implies a dominant 7th sound that would require a tonal resolution to the tonic. Pärt’s harmonic language avoids these tonal conventions.
Example #4 – *Cantate Domino, mm. 32-42*

In another example, taken from *Missa Syllabica* mm. 1-6, Pärt uses the same approach in the context of a minor key, D minor. In a similar manner, Pärt avoids pairing scale degree 2 in the melodic voice with scale degree 5 in the Tintinnabuli voice in order to remove functional bass movement.

Example #5 – *Missa Syllabica, mm. 1-6*
Another device used to avoid tonal movement is voice crossing, which is also frequently used in early polyphonic music.\(^\text{115}\) However, Pärt uses the device for the opposite reason than early composers, who were concerned with keeping a smooth line that required the soprano, at times, to dip below the alto voice, or vice versa.\(^\text{116}\) Pärt’s usage of this device has the effect of interrupting the smoothness that would otherwise be achieved with the conjunct motion of the melodic voice, perhaps the opposite goal from the renaissance composer who crosses voices in order to keep the smooth line at the expense of orchestrational decisions. In the highlighted example from \textit{An den wassern}, m. 4,\(^\text{117}\) as the soprano melodic voice follows a logical additive system, the Tintinnabuli, or accompaniment part, crosses registers, blurring the smoothness of the line and removing the functional \(v/I/V/i\) harmonic progression that might otherwise be audible.

\textbf{Example #6 – \textit{An den wassern}, m. 4}

\(^\text{115}\) Keeler

\(^\text{116}\) \textit{ibid}

\(^\text{117}\) Original title in 1976: \textit{In Spe}
Second Class

As we look at the next class in Pärt’s contrapuntal system, we begin to learn more about his note choices in his construction of harmony. Pärt’s second class is comprised of 2 melodic voices against 1 Tintinnabuli voice. Multiple melodic voices in Pärt’s language often feature contrary motion. In the example below, extracted from the Gloria movement of Missa Syllabica, the Tintinnabuli line is voiced in register to sound directly between the two melodic lines, creating closely packed clusters. As Pärt begins to combine more than two voices, he is careful to avoid common-practice tonal implications by limiting the feeling of chordal movement. With the lowest notes in the clusters moving between the organ and tenor parts, the listener hears no sense of bass movement and therefore has no recognition of any chord progression. Another interesting observation is the note choices in the Tintinnabuli voice avoid certain doublings that bring too much weight upon intervals that stick out, similar to cautious rules of doubling the third in common-practice harmony.

Example #7 – II. Gloria, from Missa Syllabica, mm. 1-11
Notice how the melodic voices in the above example mostly move by contrary motion or mirrored inversion. While Pärt finds that contrary motion creates a kind of smoothness, he does not value it to the degree that Renaissance or Baroque composers would, as Pärt is far more comfortable with the placement of dissonant intervals and the character that arises from their presence in two lines of counterpoint. Major 7<sup>th</sup> and minor 2<sup>nd</sup> intervals share equality with consonant chord tones here.

**Third Class**

As the number of voices increase in the Tintinnabuli system, more nuances of Pärt’s language are revealed. The next two contrapuntal classes are constructions that utilize four distinct lines, which combine two melodic voices and two Tintinnabuli voices. The composer finds multiple ways of constructing four part passages, which are offered in three pieces composed in 1977: *Cantate Domino*, *Missa Syllabica* and *Summa*. Remaining consistent among these pieces is the avoidance of common-practice tonality by removing the sense of chord progression and functional bass. This is a task that becomes more difficult when 4 distinct voices are used.

The simplest example of the two approaches occurs when two melodic lines are set against two Tintinnabuli accompaniment lines. In this scenario, the two melodic lines appear to be constructed together, forming a duet that is independent of the paired Tintinnabuli voices. In example #8 below, the melodic voices appear in smooth contrary motion, making strong use of important intervals such as minor...
2nd’s and direct perfect intervals. The composer avoids the weight of traditional tonality in the melodic voices by eliminating the possibility of landing on the interval that is vital to tonal music: the tritone. This interval, which is very important in common-practice tonality, implies a particular outward resolution, which Pärt needs to avoid if he would like to remove functional harmony from his language.

Examples #8 - Cantate Domino - mm.9-21

Example #9 - Tritone Resolution
In the *Cantate Domino* example below, Pärt begins his melodic duet on a non-consonant interval, the minor 2nd. Because he is using contrary motion, the composer is careful in selecting his starting pitches in order to avoid the tonal intervals, making the minor 2nd ideal in this case. Also, as we will see in greater detail later, in adopting a language where 2nds, direct perfect intervals, and major 7ths are consonant intervals contrapuntally, movement between 4 voices can be achieved logically without the weight of functional harmony. In the example below, the Tintinnabuli voices are coupled together using contrary motion and are independent from the melodic voices. Noticeable in this example are brief moments of functional harmony, such as the voices in contrary motion beginning on the same pitch in m.47. However, because these moments oscillate between what is normally considered functional counterpoint and phrases that either begin or cadence on dissonant intervals like a minor 2nds or major 7ths, the composer provides us a more modern and mechanical substitute for Renaissance music, reprioritizing functionality and voice leading.

**Examples #10 - *Cantate Domino – mm.43-51***
Fourth Class

The next of Pärt's classes is the most complex contrapuntally, consisting of two pairs of voices, each including one melodic and one Tintinnabuli line. These two independent pairs are woven contrapuntally as a duet throughout the piece. In *Summa* (1977), the composer makes even greater use of minor and major 2nds, direct perfect intervals (4ths, 5ths, 8va's), and 7ths, which allows him to move freely without the tonal restrictions that triadic counterpoint is built upon (3rds, 6ths, tritone's). It should also be noted that in Summa the composer makes almost no use of voice crossing between the melodic line and its corresponding Tintinnabuli voice, which we have observed from earlier examples that this was one way that he avoided the feeling of functional bass. Instead, functional bassline, or implied chord progression, is carefully avoided through the intervallic choices that give greater emphasis to cluster and direct-block sounds. To use one of Tymoczko's components of tonality, the harmonic consistency of Pärt's Summa favors a language that is committed to the sound of direct perfect intervals and minor 2nd cluster notes as consonance, and the entire work retains this unity and consistency by never wavering from this approach. The composer can thereby move diatonically while keeping beautiful melodic motion in play in a manner that remains interesting to the ear. This is an alternative to traditional polyphony, which is also interested in beautiful melodic lines, but must use leading and suspended tones, functional harmonic movement, and cadential resolution in order to keep the ear interested.

However, Pärt's language does not allow him the freedom to move anywhere he wishes diatonically without worrying about stumbling upon traditional tonal
movement. He must avoid certain choices that would create such movement. In the example below, the contrapuntal relationship between each voice is labeled in order to show the composers favored intervals. What we notice is how prevalent direct perfect intervals are in Tintinnabuli harmonic language. In the measures below, there are a total of 65 contrapuntal moves. Perfect, or direct perfect intervals account for 32 of those moves, while 3rds and 6ths are utilized 19 times. 2nds and 7ths appear 14 times in these measures, but increase as the piece progresses. To contrast Pärt’s Tintinnabuli with traditional harmony, direct perfect intervals are not allowed at all, as the “block-like” sound is not smooth and therefore undesirable.

Example #11 – Summa (excerpt – mm. 1-6)
A look at contrapuntal and intervallic relationships. The intervallic relationship of each dyad is labeled above the staff. Direct Perfect Intervals are labeled = Dx
Absent altogether in the above example are tritones, which only appear a total of 11 times in the entire piece. As a tritone is perhaps the weightiest, or unstable interval in tonal music, Pärt is careful to use it lightly. As Summa progresses, the tritone is used to construct more dissonant sonorities, along with minor 2nds and major 7ths, that propel the work towards a rising climax. However, the composer avoids traditional resolution of the tritone and deals with it in the following ways.

The first appearance of the tritone is in m.20, on the final beat of the bar. Pärt leaves the interval unresolved, as he rests the top pair of voices.

**Example #12 – *Summa***

Tritone’s in *Summa* and their resolutions.

In other examples, Pärt’s resolution is a unique one, which I have labeled in m.27, the *Tintinnabuli Resolution*. Instead of resolving the tritone outward, as traditional tonality would suggest, the composer instead opts for parallel-block motion. This move is the most common treatment of the tritone in Summa.
Example #13 - *Summa*
Tritone's in *Summa.*

In the final example of tritone movement, the composer avoids resolving the tritone by moving one of the notes away before resolution. This move strips the tritone of its power and implied weight that suggests outward movement.

Example #14 - *Summa*
Tritones in *Summa* and their resolutions.

Example #15 - *Summa*
Tritone's in *Summa* and their resolutions.
Summa is also uncharacteristic in placing the Tintinnabuli voice in the driver’s seat by putting it above the melodic voice in register. The ear hears the Tintinnabuli voice as the main line, or melody, while the scalar voice is tucked underneath. This approach will ensure the composer that he will never have an instance where the top voice reaches a leading tone that requires tonal resolution, because the note choices are restricted to the intervals 1-3-5.

**Other Melodic and Contrapuntal Approaches**

Other early Tintinnabuli works are focused around one musical idea in attempts to construct an alternative language for many of the compositional techniques used by the early polyphonists. An example of *monody*, which is a single melodic voice set against an independent accompaniment, is found in *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978). Originally composed for violin and piano, *Spiegel* is an unfolding of an additive melodic process that takes 8 minutes to play out. The violin part is comprised of slow scalar phrases, while the piano part embeds the Tintinnabuli notes in its accompaniment.

Pärt explores canonical techniques in *Variationen zur Gesundung von Arinuschka* (1977), *Arbos* (1977), and, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* (1977). The latter two examples use the technique of “mensuration canon,” which is a melody that is executed simultaneously in different tempi.
Chordal Progressions

As Pärt's contrapuntal passages tend to avoid the use of functional bassline, chordal harmony writing would seem to be territory outside the boundaries of what Tintinnabulation would be interested in exploring. However, in Fratres (1978), which was originally composed for string quintet, the composer adopted a solution to this problem in a manner that retains his characteristic Tintinnabuli features.

Polytonality is the simultaneous juxtaposition of two or more remote tonalities or key centers within a phrase. The technique has been used throughout the 20th century by composers such as Stravinsky and Ives, and also in Broadway and Jazz. Typically, an accompaniment pattern is established in one key while a melodic line in another key is layered on top in a jarring, but folk-like way. Stravinsky's L'histoire du Soldat makes frequent use of polytonality in this fashion. In the example below, the double bass executes a pattern that has a strong tonality in G Major, while the trumpet plays a phrase atop that is firmly in B Major. It is then answered by the violin in a phrase that is closer to the G Major tonality established by the bass.118

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118 There are other ways that composers use polytonality, but this example represents a simple usage of the device. Stravinsky explored this technique famously in many pieces throughout his career.
In constructing chordal progressions, Pärt makes use of polytonality, but in a very different way than Stravinsky. *Fratres* is made up of an additive chordal and melodic process where the main figure is expanded gradually until a phrase has completed reaching every note of an *A Phrygian Dominant* scale. This process is repeated as a melodic inversion, and then in corresponding downward transpositions of a 3rd until the entire cycle has been exhausted.

To the ear, the *Fratres* progression sounds like a series of chords that begin and end in A major. However, both the key signature and the Tintinnabuli voice indicate A minor as the composers conceptual tonality of the piece. The A major sounding chord progression is the result of triadic intervallic stacking of the pitches in *A Phrygian Dominant* (5th mode of the D Harmonic Minor scale) along with the A minor Tintinnabuli voice.\(^{119}\) Pärt therefore remains consistent in his Tintinnabuli language in including a melodic line set against a Tintinnabuli voice that is fixed to

\(^{119}\) It is important to consider the scale in question an A Phrygian Dominant scale and not a D harmonic minor scale as there is a strong sense of tonic on the pitch A. The juxtaposition of the Tintinnabuli voice is crucial to the composers approach in *Fratres*, as both voices must share the same tonic. His use of the A Phrygian Dominant is similar to a jazz musician’s approach to improvisation where each progressive chord change may have its own mode built upon the tonic of the vertical harmonic movement, thereby ignoring the key signature or perhaps the preceding chords.
pitches in the tonic triad. This polytonal approach offers Pärt the ability to travel into tonal constructions that are outside of either key, as the combination of both tonalities results in an interesting and logical chord progression.

**Example #17 – Polytonality in Fratres**

The example below is a reduction of the piece, which demonstrates Pärt's logic behind the *Fratres* chord progression and the melodic process that determines the length and starting point of each phrase. The two pitches that make up the melodic line travel in parallel 10th's in A Phrygian Dominant, while the Tintinnabuli line remains in A minor. The parallel juxtaposition of both tonalities accounts for the major/minor pivoting between C and C#.
Example #18 - *Fratres (1977) for string orchestra* (excerpted and abridged with analysis)
Conclusion

Arvo Pärt's compositional style was developed in the wake of a deeply affecting life change. His conversion and subsequent devotion to his faith in the Russian Orthodox tradition presented the composer with an opportunity for artistic reinvention alongside the spiritual reinvention required by his newfound religious belief. As a result, Pärt's new music reflected his own Tabula Rasa as he took several years to develop new compositional processes that would not only reflect his new life as an Orthodox observer, but would also utilize the practices of his faith in his compositional process through the form of prayer and the use of religious literature for creative source material. Allowing religious texts that are meaningful to him to act as structural and topical guides, Pärt imbues his devotional activity with his compositional process. His new music, therefore, took on a form and intent that was starkly different than his previous work, which is evident in the sonic characteristics and subject matter of both oeuvre.

The composers’ new musical style that emerged in 1976, which was later named Tintinnabulation, is the result of a creative process developed through careful study and exhaustive exercises. While the sound of Tintinnabulation, to many, evokes early classical music of the 12th through 16th centuries, Pärt’s works are modern constructions governed by a logical and consistent system of composing developed in the years of creative silence that coincided with his religious conversion. Upon discovering a logical system, the composer developed his language through a process similar to traditional species counterpoint, which required a step-by-step approach; from a place of restraint to the eventual freedom,
albeit stylistic, that the composer now executes in his work. In crafting his contrapuntal and harmonic language, the composer explored alternatives to the stylistic conventions that would become common-practice tonality. These alternatives presented Pärt with a language that was both logical and diatonic, but liberated from the weight implied by tonal voice leading, functional bass, and chordal movement. As Tintinnabuli music has its own set of conventions that have become integral features of the language, such as direct perfect interval movement, tritone avoidance or nuanced resolution, orchestrational voice crossing, and two-voice constructions utilizing triadic against diatonic moving lines, Pärt has established his unique artistic language that has subsequently won him an influential and meaningful place in concert music.

**Beyond the Early Tintinnabuli Compositions**

Upon establishing a logical system, Arvo Pärt did not adhere to its simplest form for long. After 1980, Pärt became progressively more liberal with the style that he developed, which supports the idea that his first Tintinnabuli compositions were aimed at constructing the new system. Throughout his career henceforth, the key attributes of Tintinnabulation remain present, as well as the spiritual content that governs the subject of his works. For example, *Silouan Song* (1994), a piece for string orchestra and a text setting of writings by an Orthodox monk, St. Silouan, uses passages from Silouan’s writings on prayer in a syllabic manner to dictate the melodic material of the piece.\(^{120}\) It’s as if the piece were written for voices that sing

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\(^{120}\) Hillier, p. 177
the text, but instead, phrases are played instrumentally by the string orchestra. One of Pärt’s recent compositions, *Symphony No. 4 ‘Los Angeles’* (2010), also employs this technique throughout in a more expanded way.\textsuperscript{121} It is yet another way that the composer engages with the text and spiritual content of his music in the act of composing.

Another musician in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century implemented this idea in his compositions with explicitly spiritual content. John Coltrane used text in the forms of prayers, spiritual literature, and newspaper articles in word-by-word instrumental musical recitations in his performances. These moments of dictations sat in contrast to the impressively virtuosic and harmonically advanced material that it broke free from. As we turn to consider our next case study, we will notice some similarities in post-conversion approach and development, but striking differences in sound and musical form.

\textsuperscript{121} Sharma, *WSJ*
chapter four

John Coltrane: spiritual awakening
Modern Jazz and the 1960’s

Jazz in the 1960’s was pulled in several directions as musicians began to explore a range of new approaches. The results from this freedom were so varied that each artist’s contribution was unique. Miles Davis’ music in the early 1960’s incorporated complex metric shifts alongside unusual harmonic progressions and angular motivic phrases. Ornette Coleman freed conventions even further, releasing the rhythm section from time signature, chord progression, formal restrictions, and tonal center. Some jazz artists used non-Western traditions as a launching point (Sun-Ra), while others moved closer to soul (Cannonball Adderley), rock (Gary Burton), or commercial pop (Oliver Nelson). John Coltrane, in the 1960’s, was influenced by African,\textsuperscript{122} Spanish,\textsuperscript{123} modal,\textsuperscript{124} and avant-garde\textsuperscript{125} musical forms. With the release of each studio recording in the 60’s, Coltrane appeared to be offering up new “concept albums” that fused his approach to jazz with these non-traditional influences.

At the end of 1964, one concept stuck, and he spent the next three years integrating his newfound spiritual beliefs and practices into his music. Although he had already been searching for ways to inject symbolic meaning into his compositions, Coltrane’s spiritual life provided a new way to approach writing music, and it also altered his conception of his performance environment. As the

\textsuperscript{122} Africa/Brass, Impulse Records, 1961

\textsuperscript{123} Olé Coltrane, Impulse Records, 1961

\textsuperscript{124} My Favorite Things, Atlantic Records, 1960

\textsuperscript{125} The Avant-Garde, Atlantic Records, 1960
music recorded in his final years demonstrates, Coltrane transformed the bandstand into a sacred space that fused his creative process with his devotional practices. He died in the summer of 1967, in the midst of this prolific experimental period.

Coltrane spoke of two important junctures where his life was impacted by deepened spiritual commitments. The first was described in the liner notes of a studio album recorded in December 1964, *A Love Supreme*.

> “During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music. I feel this has been granted through His grace. ALL PRAISE TO GOD.”

As the composer referred to his experience in 1957 as a *spiritual awakening*, he subsequently recommitted himself in 1964 after a time when he had “lost his faith” but then “refound it.” In wake of his recommitment, Coltrane’s music changed profoundly, and he entered into the most prolific writing period in his career. Impacted by his new devotional practices, Coltrane attempted to transform the avant-garde atmosphere of 1960’s jazz into a sacred space. This new approach resulted in an abstract sonic prayer language, complex programmatic music representing spiritual mysteries important to the composer, and large-form compositions that he considered to be sacramental offerings. While the rest of the avant-garde movement in jazz was interested in freedom from artistic boundaries, Coltrane was composing and recording abstract music with sonic similarities to free

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126 Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, liner notes

127 Delorme, *Coltrane, Star of Antibes: I Can’t Go Further*, in DeVito, p. 245
jazz, but instead with specific meaning in the content and intent for their performances.

**John Coltrane and his Progression**

John Coltrane had been performing and recording as a regular member of Miles Davis’ quintet from 1955, when the trumpeter selected the unknown 29-year-old tenor saxophonist to the surprise of many. For two years, the quintet maintained a rigorous touring schedule and Coltrane began to adopt a lifestyle that would settle into addiction, following many in the greater jazz community as well as band members in Miles’ group. In April of 1957, after touring throughout the Bay Area and the Midwest, the quintet began a residency in New York City at Café Bohemia that was scheduled to last one full month. The ensemble had started to gain some attention among jazz critics, but Davis was growing impatient with his drummer, Philly Joe Jones, and Coltrane, both of whom he described as “junkies” who were interfering with the quality of the band’s performance.

Heroin addiction was a vice that Miles Davis himself had kicked in 1954. Other well-known musicians, such as Charlie Parker, were notorious for their dependency on the drug, which ultimately led to Parker’s demise and early death.

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128 Both terms free jazz and avant-garde are used synonymously to refer to the same approach to jazz in the 1960’s. Musicians used these terms interchangeably alongside another name, The New Thing. All three names refer to 1960’s abstract jazz that was concerned with renouncing traditional jazz elements and breaking down sonic boundaries through free improvisation.

129 John Coltrane Reference, p. 132-3

130 Davis, p. 195-7
Coltrane’s addiction was so apparent that Miles noticed him nodding off on the bandstand and performing at alarmingly low levels. His appearance became disheveled, arriving to each gig with the same clothes on for weeks at a time. Davis fired Coltrane (and Jones) from the band and abruptly canceled the Bohemia residency midstream on April 14th.\footnote{Davis, p. 195-7, Porter, p. 104-7}

Just days after being fired from Miles’ group, word had spread that Coltrane was available, and musicians quickly scheduled him on recording dates.\footnote{Coltrane records on sessions for Thelonious Monk and some artists on Prestige Records on April 16th, 18th, 19th, and 20th. Had he still been tied up performing at Café Bohemia, he would have been unavailable to be included on these sessions. It appears as though his presence on these dates was rather spontaneous, as in some cases the bands already included another tenor saxophonist.} Soon after, the saxophonist returned to his home in Philadelphia, where his wife Naima, step-daughter Syeeda, and mother Alice lived in an apartment together. He was at the end of his rope, fatigued, and dependent on a habit that was destroying him on all levels.

Upon his return home, John discussed plans to kick his heroin addiction with his family and asked for help in working through a tough couple of weeks that would be required of such an endeavor.\footnote{Thomas, p. 82} With the help of the women in his home, he succeeded in kicking his drug addiction – a turning point in his life. Another important event in these weeks was a religious transformation that the composer referred to as a \textit{spiritual awakening}. In an interview in 1964, Coltrane elaborated on
this transformation, providing a glimpse at some of the circumstances that made it meaningful. In a reporter’s words:

“He walked a fast trail of self-destruction for much of his early adulthood. By the time he was 31, he had about physically and spiritually burned himself out, and he just lay there, smoldering in deterioration. One day in 1957, he made up his mind to “get some fun out of life for a change.” He rose out of the ashes of his life to become one of the most controversial contributors to modern jazz.”

Specific information pertaining to Coltrane’s spiritual narrative from April and May of 1957 is sparse. In Lewis Porter, in his exhaustive biography, says very little about this period, partially due to the fact that earlier biographies on Coltrane did not provide source references, which made fact checking difficult. However, the most detailed account, by J.C. Thomas in Chasin’ the Trane, contains pieces of information corroborated by family sources, and it is also consistent with medical information pertaining to heroin withdraw. Thomas, who appears to have interviewed both Naima Coltrane (his wife at the time of his transformation) and the composer’s Cousin Mary Alexander, provides a narrative that is also consistent with John’s own descriptions. Thus, Thomas’ eyewitnesses surface as the best sources in understanding the events that led to Coltrane’s turning point.

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134 Gardner, Downbeat, (1962), in DeVito, p. 139
135 see Porter’s annotated bibliography on p. 378-83
136 Thomas, Chasin’ the Trane. (1976)
137 Sneed, Jazz Profile: John Coltrane, in DiVito, p.46
Coltrane’s “Spiritual Awakening” Narrative

Working in a community alongside other musicians who had either died from heroin usage, or who had retreated for a solitary time for the purpose of quitting “cold turkey,” Coltrane was well aware of what would be in store for him over the span of the following couple of weeks. Miles Davis, in successfully quitting his addiction, claims to have spent months in solitude to recover from the experience. Thomas’ account suggests that Coltrane did not leave his home, or his room, during the time that he was struggling, but McCoy Tyner recalls performing with Coltrane at the Red Rooster in Philadelphia during this season. Naima appears to have accompanied him to these performances, possibly to provide some support as he performed, and she mentions how child-like and horrible his playing became in these days. Another musician present at those performances, John Glen, describes Coltrane as visibly ill and playing “like a baby.” Coltrane first tried to ease his dependency through drinking alcohol before he eventually did confine himself to solitude in his bedroom, which Naima has said lasted for no longer than one week.

138 Davis, p. 173-4
139 Thomas, p.82-3
140 Porter, p. 105
141 Khan, p. 25-6 (from an audio interview with John’s cousin Mary Alexander in 2001)
142 Porter, p. 105
143 Porter, p. 106
144 Thomas, p. 83
As an addict enters a state of withdrawal from heroin dependency, medical sources describe affects on the body and mental health that are consistent with Coltrane’s narrative. For example, an addict will loose his appetite for several days, and in Thomas’ account (provided by Naima), Coltrane had instructed his family that he would “only drink water and would eat nothing.” Another symptom is the loss of control of ones muscles, which accounts for Coltrane’s limited abilities on the bandstand and “childlike” performing. Excessive perspiration, fatigue, and mental anguish are additional symptoms of withdrawal, which for most is a process that will take longer than a week to accomplish detoxication. Recent medical studies have shown that only about 10% of addicts actually achieve independence from heroin, partially because quitting is such a difficult process to endure, and also because most individuals do not have the resources to help in the process. Coltrane relied on two sources of strength during this time: his family and spiritual renewal. Multiple biographical accounts mention the posture of prayer that occurred in Coltrane’s family at this time, which Naima recognized years later as a significant activity that provided personal

145 Hanson, p. 265-6
146 Thomas, p. 83
147 Hanson, p. 265-6
148 Thomas, p. 82
strength.\textsuperscript{149} It also appears as though Coltrane took time in his solitude to read religious literature and philosophy.\textsuperscript{150}

Although details are limited as to what kind of religious experience led to Coltrane’s spiritual awakening while he remained in solitude, the composer provides one window into his religious activity at the time. Upon reemerging onto the music scene on May 31\textsuperscript{st} for a recording session for Prestige Records, Coltrane’s first recorded composition was titled \textit{Straight Street}. The name is derived from New Testament scripture found in Acts 9:1-19 that is associated with the conversion of St. Paul.

Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias! Yes, Lord,” he answered.

The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” (Acts 9:8-12)

The convert, Saul,\textsuperscript{151} upon his spiritual awakening, has arrived at a house on Straight Street where he will have his sight restored. Although Coltrane does not tell us exactly what experience he had had, his use of the text suggests that the composer had at least resonated with Paul’s conversion narrative and that he understood his own transformation through this lens. The legend circulated among the Jazz community was that Coltrane was “touched by God” during this time – as

\textsuperscript{149} Simpkins, p. 57-8

\textsuperscript{150} Thomas, p.83

\textsuperscript{151} later renamed Paul
Bobby Timmons put it\footnote{Thomas, 186-7} Ultimately, the exact details of Coltrane’s religious experience are not vital in understanding his transformation. What is important is that this season represented a pivotal moment in Coltrane’s life and, in looking back years later, he ascribes great emphasis to it as he explains the meaning behind his new music.

\textbf{“Religious Conversion” and Coltrane’s Theology}

Coltrane’s theological ideas require some examination before we begin to study his music. In using the term \textit{spiritual awakening}, Coltrane avoids the idea of a \textit{conversion} from one theology to another, as was the case with Arvo Pärt. In fact, Coltrane’s actual theology does not appear to change much, but he instead affirms a heightened spiritual commitment that resulted in a life change, and subsequently an artistic change as well. Though Coltrane was raised as a Methodist Christian in the North Carolina, his theological views around 1955 were inclusive of all religions and in some unity between them.\footnote{Blume, \textit{Interview with John Coltrane}, in Devito, p.13} After he had several years to develop his theology as a religious observer, he remained universally accepting of a variety of religious views. In the liner notes to one of his spiritually focused compositions, \textit{Meditations} (1965), Coltrane stated: “I believe in all religions.”\footnote{John Coltrane, \textit{Meditations}, liner notes, in DeVito, p. 263} His spiritual activity included the use of religious literature and devotional practices from Hinduism, Kabbalah (13\textsuperscript{th} century Jewish Mysticism), Christianity, Buddhism, and Sufism (19\textsuperscript{th} century}
Islamic Mysticism). Still, our definition for religious conversion\textsuperscript{155} used throughout this dissertation is inclusive of Coltrane’s spiritual awakening, and it is especially relevant in light of the changes in the composer’s music that would become manifest in the years that followed.

Coltrane’s compositions do not suggest that any particular established religion was central for any period of time. In other words, it does not appear that he went through a Christian phase before moving on to a Hindu phase, but instead, he was embracing of the inclusion of all of these theologies from the beginning of his spiritual journey. For example, just weeks before recording the composition “The Father and The Son and The Holy Ghost” from the Meditations Suite (11/23/65) – a clear reference to Christian Trinitarian theology – Coltrane recorded an album titled Om (10/1/65), which is a Hindu word for God. On this album, Coltrane and his band recite portions of the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient Hindu scriptural text. His compositions consistently document a Universalist theology in the three years that these works were created.

\textsuperscript{155} “An experience of increased devotion within the same religious framework, a shift from no religious commitment to a devout religious life, or a change from one religious affiliation to another.” – Ullman, see Chapter 2
Table no. 1 – Coltrane’s Religious Interests and Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buddhist</th>
<th>Although Coltrane’s music does not directly reference any particular Buddhist ideas, save for those that are shared theologically with Hinduism, both John and Alice had visited and prayed at Buddhist temples on their tour of Japan in 1966. He was introduced to Indian Buddhism by John Glenn.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Coltrane grew up in a strong Methodist household in North Carolina. His grandfather, who was an influential figure in the family, was a Methodist minister and community leader. Coltrane’s “spiritual awakening” in 1957 was guided in part by New Testament scripture from the book of Acts (9:1-19) dealing with the conversion of St. Paul. During his late career, Coltrane used some Christian theology as a basis for musical ideas, for example, The Father, and The Son, and The Holy Ghost, which is a movement in the Meditations suite (1965).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Possibly having the most direct influence on his music, Hindu literature and meditative practices were attractive to Coltrane, who recorded an album in 1965 titled, Om, which is the Hindu word for God. At the beginning and end of the piece, Coltrane and the musicians recording on the album cite portions of the Bhagavad Gita, which is an ancient Hindu scripture. Coltrane was interested in this scripture as he studied the works of Hindu spiritual leaders during the last years of his life. He had talked to Ravi Shankar about the Gita, Hindu practices, and their connection with modern music. Several other books on Coltrane’s booklist are of Hindu subject matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamism</td>
<td>Many of Coltrane’s social and professional contemporaries were Muslim observers, including his wife Naima. Although Naima points out that Coltrane never became a Muslim, his friends have mentioned conversations with the composer on the subject of Islam and its practices. In April 1964, Coltrane attended a speech given by Malcolm X in New York City just before the spiritual leaders’ assassination. Though Coltrane’s music does not have bear specific relationship to Muslim subject matter, Coltrane shows interest in 18th century Islamic Mysticism called Sufism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>The Psalm movement in A Love Supreme (1964) is loosely based on the form of Hebrew poetry found in the Biblical Psalms. It follows traditional Psalmist structure, which includes poetic words of praise, and a story of turning away, redemption, and repetition. Coltrane was also interested in Kabbalah forms of spirituality, which is a 13th century Jewish mysticism that the composer was introduced to through other jazz musicians.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Giant Steps and the Years in Between**

Although it would take about 6 years to establish the overt connection between his music and spiritual life, in the days following his 1957 awakening, Coltrane began to experiment with musical ideas that would lead to some of his most significant contributions. Pianist McCoy Tyner, who was in his late teens and living in Philadelphia at the time, recalls visiting Coltrane’s apartment often when the composer was home from touring, where the two musicians would practice and improvise together around the piano. Tyner claims that in May 1957, Coltrane
placed the chord changes to Giant Steps and Countdown\textsuperscript{156} in front of him in order to practice the complex harmonic possibilities in improvising on these changes.\textsuperscript{157} According to another biographer, C.O. Simpkins, Coltrane “heard” some kind of new music in a dream during his days of dependency withdrawal.\textsuperscript{158} Coltrane himself seems to corroborate hearing particular music in a dream in 1957, although he points to even later and more abstract music like the kind recorded in 1965.\textsuperscript{159} One detail that is confirmed, however, is Coltrane’s own description about his composing style in the late 1950’s and early 60’s, which consisted of working on harmony first at a piano,\textsuperscript{160} and then once something interesting was achieved, adding a melodic line that coincided with the chord progression that he established. The complex chromatic bebop chord progressions of the tunes Giant Steps, Countdown, 26-2, Satellite, and several other related original compositions, appear to be conceived during a period of experimentation by a composer in search of new possibilities undertaken during a time of personal recovery and spiritual renewal. Although Coltrane would later abandon the harmonic trajectory that he developed a few years after his awakening, his search for a new creative language is consistent with that of

\textsuperscript{156} The chord changes to Giant Steps, Countdown, and a few other complex compositions by Coltrane are among the most challenging to master in modern jazz repertoire.

\textsuperscript{157} Porter, p. 150

\textsuperscript{158} Simpkins, p. 58

\textsuperscript{159} Ruyter, \textit{Interview with John Coltrane}, in DiVito, p. 248

\textsuperscript{160} Grime, \textit{John Coltrane Talks to Jazz News}, in DiVito, p. 120
Arvo Pärt. Both composers experienced artistic derailments resulting in a quest for new musical possibilities.

John Coltrane’s advanced harmonic approach to the bebop jazz language was only the beginning of his artistic quest. More drastic changes begin to appear late in 1964, after Coltrane reaffirmed his spiritual commitment and began exploring new ways to integrate his religious practices with his work. Coinciding with several significant life changes, including separating from his first wife Naima, meeting his second wife Alice McLoud, and recommitting himself to his spirituality, Coltrane begins to reflect his beliefs – speaking openly about them during interviews.162

“I refound my faith several years ago. I had already found it and lost it several times. I was brought up in a religious family, I had the seeds of it in me, and, at certain moments, I find my faith again.”163

“I entered into a phase which was contradictory to the pledge and away from the esteemed path; but thankfully, now and again through the unerring and merciful hand of God, I do perceive and have been duly re-informed of His OMNIPOTENCE, and of our need for, and dependence on Him.”164

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161 The exact timing of his spiritual renewal is not available, but it may coincide with his meeting Alice McLoud in the summer of 1963. The first time he expresses his spiritual ideas publicly, however, is in December of 1964. Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider his recommitment sometime between these two dates.

162 Prior to 1963, interviews and public statements were very limited, with only one documented interview pointing out Coltrane’s spiritual transition (Gardner). After gaining such popularity with the release of A Love Supreme, interviewers begin to ask Coltrane questions about his work and spiritual life.

163 Delorme, Coltrane, Star of Antibes: I Can’t Go Further, in DeVito, p. 245

164 Liner notes to A Love Supreme
The “Sound” of Spirituality and the Search for Meaning

In “refinding his faith” around 1964, Coltrane began exploring new musical ideas that incorporated spiritual content and his devotional practices into his compositions. In a general sense, listeners had been sensitive to Coltrane's “spiritual” sound and approach early in the 1960's. Alice McLoud, who met Coltrane in the summer of 1963, stated that she heard this spiritual element in his music at this time, which became a point of conversation for the two musicians as they got to know each other.

As early as 1961, when Coltrane released My Favorite Things on Atlantic Records, listeners began to pick up on an approach by that contained qualities described by many as spiritual. Several musical features added to this assumption among listeners and press. First, Coltrane's band began to play music set atop a strict drone, which required the bassist to a limited set of note choices act percussive sounds. Listeners were reminded of the Indian Raga music made popular in the 1960’s by Ravi Shankar. Coltrane’s solos began to explore the harmonic and timbral possibilities through long improvisations using only one chord. In addition to virtuosic melodic passages that remind us of his former “sheets of sound” approach, Coltrane began to experiment with multiphonics and abrasive squawks on his newly acquired soprano saxophone, which had not been

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165 for example, Spellman, Heard and Seen, in Woideck, p. 220,
Wilmer, Conversation with Coltrane, in DeVito, p. 118

166 Ratliff, p. 147

167 Horace Silver is documented in Thomas in stating that Coltrane was leading the way for bringing spiritual elements into his music. (p. 122)
prominent in jazz since Sidney Bechet. Adding other soloists who performed in the same vein, such as Eric Dolphy, added to the notion that exploration of a new sound had become primary for these pioneers. The assumption of spirituality in Coltrane’s music became noticeable to audiences when entire performances of *My Favorite Things* would last for 40 minutes alone, leading listeners to assert that the artist was indeed searching for *something*. But aside from these general descriptions of Coltrane’s spirituality in his musical performances, we do not have specific examples that how such conclusions were drawn by those who heard his band, so we are left to speculate about how this aesthetic response was produced.

Coltrane indeed began to see his faith and his music to be inextricably linked, as he considered his work to be an expression, or outpouring of his spiritual life. When asked to comment on his “religion” and if it helped him in living his life and playing music, Coltrane replied: "It’s everything for me; my music is a way of giving thanks to God.”168 Quite similar to Arvo Pärt, Coltrane remarked that in living a devotional spiritual life, his music would be a natural byproduct of an observant believer.

“My goal is to live a truly religious life and express it in my music. If you live it, when you play there’s no problem because the music is just part of the whole thing. To be a musician is really something. It goes very, very, very deep. My music is the spiritual expression of what I am – my faith, my knowledge, my being.”169

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168 Delorme, *Coltrane, Star of Antibes: I Can’t Go Further*, in DeVito, p. 245
169 Zimmerman, *The New Jazz*, Newsweek, 12/12/66, in DeVito, p. 337
Sacred Space and the Avant-Garde Bandstand

Coltrane’s philosophy provoked him to explore new musical ideas that would give meaning to his work. He developed several concrete ways to fuse his spiritual life with his creative work, transforming his avant-garde bandstand into a sacred space. In considering his performance atmosphere to be a kind of holy ground, Coltrane developed an abstract sonic prayer language that he would execute on his saxophone as an act of worship or conversation with his deity. His repertoire included complex programmatic compositions that were much larger in structure, often spanning 4 to 6 contrasting movements and lasting anywhere from 20 to 50 minutes. These compositions were specific in their meaning and intent, usually focusing on spiritual mysteries, characters, or landscapes. Coltrane considered them to be sacramental offerings that he hoped would resonate with his listeners on a deeper level than traditional jazz did.

While one might object that jazz in the 1960’s was already moving toward greater freedom, it must be observed that his quest to utilize formal structures and to impart specific spiritual meaning in his work was not typically what the free jazz community hoped to accomplish. Coltrane’s spiritual music was indeed sonically free, as the harmonic and rhythmic parameters were often unrestricted and the musicians performing with him were encouraged to explore their own voice within his landscape, but his ideas for its purpose were specific, developed, and embraced a stylistic doctrine. This was different from free jazz or the avant-garde where each layer of convention and tradition was stripped away in order to embrace an environment with no boundaries or pretexts. In its infancy, Coltrane’s spiritual
music was a unique and advanced form of modern jazz, challenging the established paradigms of song form and chord progression. But as it evolved, Coltrane’s spiritual music became abstract, angular, expressive and intense; uprooted from the modern jazz genre and exploring multiple avenues of liberty in sonic art, all while looking for specific meanings and utilizing a symbolic approach.

As we shift our attention to Coltrane’s music, it might be helpful to summarize the specific compositional devices the artist used in crafting his new music. Coltrane’s new spiritually focused music that was the result of his recommitment in 1964 included the following compositional techniques:

- The use of text as a way to impart direct meaning within an established art form that has no such tradition
- The establishment of a sonic prayer language used during performances as a method of worship and sacrament
- Large-form, multi-movement compositions with programmatic emphasis and spiritual symbolism

**Text and Meaning**

In November of 1963, the classic John Coltrane Quartet, now solidified after a few years of personnel changes, recorded a composition dedicated to the September 15th 1963 bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama; a hate crime that killed four African-American children. The composition, titled “Alabama,” was centered around a free, timeless drone in C minor. Coltrane used text from a Martin Luther King, Jr. eulogy as a guide for his melodic line, which syllabically followed each word using pitches in the Dorian mode while the rhythmic execution was

\[^{170}\text{McCoy Tyner – Piano, Jimmy Garrison – Bass, Elvin Jones - Drums}\]
dictated in a speech-like manner.\textsuperscript{171} The resultant work was significant, not only to Coltrane, but also to jazz listeners, who were moved by the emotional content of such an approach.

Having stumbled upon a concrete way to impart direct meaning in his compositions through the use of text, Coltrane began expanding on this concept in 1964. He had already been in search of new methods of composing that would emphasize melody over harmony.\textsuperscript{172} Where his attempts to write meaningful compositions prior to this time would consist of music that would be dedicated to individuals, using the spirit of the groove and melody to capture their personal characteristics,\textsuperscript{173} Coltrane now became interested in saying something very concrete and specific in his work. He began to write poetry and set the words in a manner similar to “Alabama” in order to express something meaningful in the composition. His next studio album after the release of “Alabama”\textsuperscript{174} was titled \textit{Crescent} (1964) and it featured three compositions that utilized this melodic-text recitation technique: “Wise One,” “Drum Thing,” and “Lonnie’s Lament.” Although the composer revealed that these three pieces were indeed poems first, and that

\textsuperscript{171} Attempts to find exactly which paragraphs Coltrane used of King’s eulogy have not been successful.

\textsuperscript{172} Delorme, \textit{Coltrane, Star of Antibes: I Can’t Go Further}, in DeVito, p. 245

\textsuperscript{173} Ruyter, \textit{Interview with John Coltrane}, in Devito, p. 194

\textsuperscript{174} For example, several songs from \textit{Giant Steps} (1959) were composed with this approach: Naima, Syeeda’s Song Flute, Cousin Mary, and Mr. P.C.

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Alabama} was released in 1964 on the album titled \textit{Live at Birdland}. However, \textit{Alabama} and another track on the album were not performed or recorded live at the venue, but were rather studio recordings.
“Wise One” was dedicated to his wife at the time,¹⁷⁵ we do not have the text associated with any of them. The melodic approach of “Wise One” and “Drum Thing,” however, is unmistakable in its use and recitation of textual material, following the same rubato style that Coltrane used in “Alabama.” On the other hand, “Lonnie’s Lament” could easily be mistaken for a more typical modern jazz composition if it weren’t for Coltrane’s statement that it was in fact derived from a poem of his.¹⁷⁶

**Spiritual Music**

Coltrane’s quest to bring direct meaning into his work was developed in a mature way in his next composition, his seminal work, *A Love Supreme* (1964). A four-movement suite inspired by religious content and ideas, *A Love Supreme* makes further use of the melodic-text recitation approach in the fourth movement, titled “Psalm.” For the first time, Coltrane included his text in the liner notes of the album jacket, which is also accompanied by a long commentary about his 1957 spiritual awakening, his recommitment, and the direct meaning and narrative of the work – including ideas about religious worship, prayer, and redemption. He would continue to utilize his melodic text-recitation approach in later compositions such as “Song of Praise” (5/17/65), “Prayer and Meditation: 4am” (6/10/65), and “Attaining” (8/26/65).

¹⁷⁵ Naima Coltrane

¹⁷⁶ Delorme, *Coltrane, Star of Antibes: I Can’t Go Further*, in DeVito, p. 244-5
Coltrane’s melodic-text approach reminds us of Arvo Pärt, who used text in a similar manner as a syllabic guide that the composer would derive melodic material from. For both composers, this use of text allowed them to transform their compositions to be a kind of religious sacrament, or a worshipful act to God. It also changed the intent of the presentation of these compositions from a traditional concert performance to an aural space where sacred ideas are reflected in the abstract.

Other instances of Coltrane’s use of text led him to recite aloud portions during recordings and performances, sometimes as reoccurring compositional motives, and other times as reflections related to the content of the piece. In the “Acknowledgement” movement of A Love Supreme, Coltrane can be heard on the recording singing the established melodic theme of the track with the lyrics “A Love Supreme,” which reveals the symbolic nature that the artist ascribed to the pitches as they were used in variation throughout the work.

Example no. 1 – A Love Supreme
Excerpt from original studio recording. This portion is sung by Coltrane and possibly another musician after an improvisation on the same motive transposed chromatically in 12 keys.

6:30 – Singing

A love supreme, a love supreme, a love supreme, a love supreme,

Pärt used this approach in composing Silouan’s Song and Symphony No. 4, which are both later compositions than the conversion era that I was concerned with in Chapter 3.
In a live performance in 1965 at a church in Brooklyn, NY, Coltrane recited the text to his “Psalm” prior to performing an abstract avant-garde improvisation as a way of establishing his bandstand as an environment where sacred ideas are contextualized. On other recordings, such as *Om* (1965) and *Reverend King* (1966), Coltrane chanted religious texts or sentiments at the beginning and end of the compositions, thereby framing the musical portions of the pieces in a specific spiritual context.

**Sonic Prayer Language**

In *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane introduced other new methods of using spiritual activity as a compositional process; ideas that he would continue to utilize throughout his career. A significant goal was to develop a sonic prayer language where the artist can say something very specific, transforming his music into an act of worship. Related to the melodic-text recitation technique, Coltrane begins to ascribe religious sentiments to certain musical motives, such as praise statements like “Thank you Lord” or “Amen.” One such musical phrase – first introduced in the opening and closing moments of *A Love Supreme* – is repeated in several compositions, and the general approach is sustained throughout the rest of his life. Although his harmonic language in 1964 is one that makes translating or finding such phrases challenging, this particular *amen* phrase introduced in *A Love Supreme*, its pitch collection, and the placement within other spiritual works, is an important example of Coltrane’s musical process and its relationship to his spiritual life.

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178 Porter, p.275-6
At the very beginning of the first movement of *A Love Supreme*, titled “Acknowledgment,” Coltrane executes the following phrase.

**Example no. 2 – Acknowledgment from A Love Supreme**

:00 - :15

Using only scale degrees 1, 4, and 5 in B minor, Coltrane’s melodic line sweeps through these pitches in a stately manner as a free, timeless introduction before the groove and main theme is established.\(^{179}\)

But something interesting occurs at the end of *A Love Supreme*, in the fourth movement “Psalm,” after Coltrane recites his poem through his melodic-text approach, and it provides a clue for the significance of the 1-4-5 pitch-collection as representative of his sonic prayer language. He restates this theme to close out the work, but in doing so begins on scale degree 2 (D). In listening back to the tape during the recording session,\(^{180}\) Coltrane heard this “error” and was apparently not satisfied with allowing the note (D) to linger, as it interrupted the intended 1-4-5

\(^{179}\) On the recording, one note does break this pattern and I do not notate it in the above example, as it appears to be an unintended note, weakly executed and clam-like.

\(^{180}\) Kahn, p. 104
pitch-collection that he had already established and stated in the beginning of the piece. In attempts to keep the take, which he must have been very satisfied with, Coltrane overdubs another saxophone part on top using the pitch C (scale degree 1) and its corresponding octave. The result is that there are two saxophone parts sounding, one with the error, and the other drawing attention away from the offensive note in attempts to cover it up, or in effect, erase it. The presence of this second saxophone part, entirely uncharacteristic of both jazz recordings in the 1960’s and John Coltrane’s approach to performing and recording, demonstrate the sacredness of the *amen* phrase to the composer.

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181 Editing this note out would have been impossible given the way that jazz musicians recorded in this time and due to the setup in Rudy Van Gelder’s studio. In today’s recording environment, a greater effort is made to isolate instrumentalists in case corrections need to be “punched-in.” In Van Gelder’s studio, which was one large room where the band played facing each other in a semi-circle, there would have been no way to remove the saxophone part from the rest of the ensemble. The only way Coltrane would have been able to make his correction was to “cover it up” by recording his additional line. The result is that both parts are audible. This method of editing was not at all common to jazz recordings, where spontaneity and interactive performance was the goal for the record. Yet Coltrane felt strongly enough to both keep his masterful take, while awkwardly superimposing an additional saxophone overdub at the very end to complete the *Amen* motive in its pure and intended form. (Photographs of Van Gelder’s studio from the *A Love Supreme* recording sessions appear in the John Coltrane Reference, and in Khan, *A Love Supreme*).

182 For example, Coltrane did not reveal to the band the programmatic content of *A Love Supreme* prior to the recording session, nor did they rehearse at all in preparation. Coltrane remained consistent with his usual approach, which valued absolute spontaneity from his musicians. But in creating an error in the intent of the work, which is a composition of praise to his God, he felt strongly to make the correction by doing something unorthodox for a jazz record.
Example no. 3 – “Amen” statement in Psalm from A Love Supreme
Notes appearing in ( ) are unintended pitches. The first one (D) is the note that Coltrane is interested in covering up, while the second (Bb) is a weak sounding clam note that sounds like a mistake. Attention is also drawn away from this note due to the swelling 8va C’s.

The *amen* phrase appears in other recordings and performances throughout the rest of Coltrane’s life, always occurring in pieces with a spiritual focus. In improvising, Coltrane has said that he shifts his thinking from musical concepts to spiritual concepts, the later being used as an act of worship in performance. His *amen* moments are consistent with this idea, in that the artist is addressing God and saying something specific; a word of praise or acknowledgment. During the second day of the *A Love Supreme* recording sessions, Coltrane recorded alternate takes, some with additional musicians, but he continued to state his *amen* phrase. This time, however, he eliminates using the octave, but retains the important 1-4-5 structure in tact. Note also the similarity in rhythm in the flourishing 16th’s that consistently land on the 5th scale degree, as in the original version of “Acknowledgement.”

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183 Yui, *Interviews with John Coltrane*, in DeVito, p. 271
Example no. 4 – Acknowledgement from *A Love Supreme* – alternate take

The only known live recording of *A Love Supreme* took place in July of 1965 in Antibes, France. Coltrane’s *Amen* statement at this performance is similar to the alternate take version.

Example no. 5 – Acknowledgement from *A Love Supreme* (Live in Antibes)

While Coltrane could have meant for the phrase in question to simply be a generic statement of praise, he provided a more specific clue into its intended meaning by turning it into a composition titled, “Amen” (8/26/65). The piece is in the form of a more traditional modern jazz composition, in that it is in-tempo atop a fast hardbop-like groove. Notice how Coltrane’s melody is restricted to the same pitches used in the analogous phrases of *A Love Supreme*. The only difference in the example below is the key signature, E minor instead of B minor. This changes the relationship of the phrase slightly from a 1-4-5 scale degree motive to a 1-2-5 motive, but the pitches B-E-F# are constant. The example below is directly related to Coltrane’s sonic prayer language and provides us with the idea, through the title, as to what kind of religious concept he intended to communicate through this music.
Though, ascribing an exact translation to Coltrane’s phrase may not important, it is clear is that the *amen* phrase is a motive that, for the composer, was akin to praise or acknowledgement of his God. Coltrane’s phrase may specifically mean *amen*, but it may also mean other statements of praise and worship for the artist. What is clear is that he consistently used this phrase to begin and end compositions that had spiritual focus, and he continued this practice until the end of his life. 

In a recording session in the final months of his life, Coltrane uses this phrase to open a work titled “Offering” (2/15/67). The opening B minor chord in the rhythm section followed by Coltrane’s statement would lead the listener to think that the tune was another version of *A Love Supreme*, but just moments later, Coltrane moves on from his motive, making it clear that the work is indeed a different composition with a similar spiritual approach. Consistent in this execution of the *amen* phrase is the use of 1-4-5 scale degrees, this time spanning a greater range within B minor.
An earlier work, titled “Attaining” (8/26/1965), finds the amen phrase at the conclusion of an expressive and atonal improvisation that sounds like free jazz in its harmonic, rhythmic, and free structural approach. The amen phrase sticks out in particular, as it contrasts the wildly expressive and angular language preceding it. Though he does not strictly adhere to the 1-4-5 collection of pitches, his execution is stately and out of character of the wild music so that the spirit of the amen, its use of 4ths and contour reveal the purpose of the phrase. Coltrane may have been thinking of different transpositions and inversions of the intervals, such as 1-2-5, 1-4-9, or 1-2-4-5.

Example no. 8 – Attaining from Sun Ship, ending.

One last example comes from a late recording session that was released posthumously. Expression, recorded in the spring of 1967, probably while Coltrane was ill, uses the amen phrase in the opening of the title track. This version utilizes the 1-2-5 variation of the phrase.
Coltrane embedded the *amen* phrase in his music as an audible statement of praise, forming one example of how his spiritual life and practices altered his compositional process. It not only helped him to impart direct meaning in his work, but it also had the effect of helping him slow down in order to state a deliberate melodic fragment that was audible to the listener, although cryptic. A meditative approach, such as this one, is only one way, as there may be other manifestations of his faith expressions that are even more hidden. The composer is quoted by Thomas as having stated, “For this first time in my life, I have the whole album from beginning to end.”\(^1\) One can imagine Coltrane hearing phrases like the *amen* motive, and then developing possible variations or narratives that flow musically from these ideas as a starting point, the way many composers use small ideas to conceive of large-form works.

**Programmatic Free Jazz**

John Coltrane composed a total of 4 multi-movement suites\(^2\) that deal with spiritual content: *A Love Supreme* counting for the first, followed by the *Prayer and

\(^1\) Thomas, p. 184

\(^2\) Most writers document that Coltrane composed only 3 multi-movement suites since *Meditations* was recorded twice. However, the two versions are so different in
Meditation Suite (6/65), First Meditations (9/65), and Meditations (11/65). While these suites are all unique, there are several features that are shared, forming the basis of Coltrane’s spiritually focused compositional style. All of the suites are centered around the spiritual practices of prayer and meditation, particularly an understanding that includes progressive stages of meditations. At times somber and at times intense, Coltrane’s meditation music reflects, first, the individual call to prayer, and second, the mystical experience resulting from his meditative practices. An important detail in understanding the ways that Coltrane fuses his spiritual life with his compositional process, his meditation music points to the composers transforming of the 1960’s avant-garde jazz bandstand to a sacred space where he engages in practices of worship. He has said, “I think of the chords at times, I think of meditations at times, and rhythms at times...” and his suites reflect this strategy where Coltrane’s focus seems to follow one of the above options.

His improvisations are consistent in form throughout all 4 suites, beginning with a melodic motive that represents a sentiment specific to the artist, such as the amen phrase, and then preceding to more abstract music that utilize multiphonics and the altissimo range of the tenor saxophone. These two approaches, one very compositional makeup and in improvisational approach that they are hardly the same piece. Only the second version was released during Coltrane’s lifetime, while First Meditations was released posthumously. The two versions also consist of different movement structures and instrumentations.

186 Mystical experience is defined as instances when the incorporeal breaks into the corporeal. Religious observers often claim that a metaphysical presence or tangible manifestation of the spiritual world result from meditative practices.

187 Yui, Interviews with John Coltrane, in Devito, p. 271
rigid while the other unbridled, form Coltrane’s rendering of his meditation journeys, thereby leading to the composer to a programmatic compositional approach. As the 4 suites are slightly different in strategy, we find the composer searching for variations on spiritual ideas, sometimes utilizing his band in more structured ways and at other times allowing almost complete freedom. The multi-movement forms depict stages of prayer, akin to the spiritual literature that he was reading during this time.\textsuperscript{188} Coltrane’s approach was to favor non-traditional structures for his band and his improvisations. There are no chord progressions found in the suites, although there are indeed diatonic scales and tonal motivic figures that act as the glue for each movement. These motivic figures, scales, and pitch collections are transposed chromatically during the improvised solos, usually keeping their intervallic relationships in tact. This approach allowed Coltrane and his band to operate in a free jazz atmosphere, albeit diatonic and motivic, while shedding the dominance of bebop phrases and stylistic modern jazz conventions, such as walking bassline and streaming chordal movement.

\textsuperscript{188} Particularly, Paramhansa Yogananda’s \textit{Autobiography of a Yogi} talks about stages of Hindu meditation in Chapter 14 and elsewhere that Coltrane was influenced by.
Table 1 – Coltrane’s 4 Religious Suites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Harmonic Approach</th>
<th>Rhythmic Approach</th>
<th>Melodic Approach</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prayer and Meditation Suite (6/65)</strong></td>
<td>Five movements</td>
<td>Diminished harmony using octatonic and altered scales juxtaposed with minor 4th based chords. Compared with A Love Supreme, this is less concerned with tonal center, but it is not completely atonal in its execution. Making use of diminished harmony add a sense of dissonance to this work without it being atonal.</td>
<td>I. - Alternating between timelessness to swing grooves. II. Timeless bass solo. III. Reprise of Mtv. I music. IV. Timeless drum solo. V. Timeless theme.</td>
<td>Reoccurring octatonic theme alternating with 4th based minor modality and chromatism without tonal center.</td>
<td>Sax, Piano, Bass, Drums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Meditations (9/65)</strong></td>
<td>Five movements</td>
<td>With a greater feeling of counterpoint between all instrumentalists, chordal foundations are less prevalent. While tonal centers are heard with each movement, the emphasis on melodic themes drives the goal of the improvised explorations. Coherence is achieved as all musicians reference the thematic material or harmony associated with it.</td>
<td>I. Slow and unmeasured. II. Medium 3/4 swing. III. Medium unmeasured swing. IV. Fast but unmeasured swing. V. Slow and unmeasured.</td>
<td>Each movement has its own melodic theme using minor, major, and altered scales. Solos have a greater sense of abandoning tonality. All performers use these themes.</td>
<td>Sax, Piano, Bass, Drums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meditations (11/65)</strong></td>
<td>Five movements</td>
<td>Atonal and expressive approach. While each movement has a melodic theme there is never a sense of tonality throughout. Coltrane appears to be the only performer concerned with the thematic material of tonality, making for an odd mixture of atonality with diatonic lines.</td>
<td>While some movements are slow and some fast, the overall sound is without measure or tempo.</td>
<td>Melodic themes appear out of context against atonal accompaniments.</td>
<td>2 Sax’s, Piano, Bass, 2 Drummers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In *A Love Supreme*, which is accompanied by descriptive and expressive liner notes written by Coltrane with the salutation “Dear Listener,” the composer appears to blend a Judeo-Christian understanding of God with Hindu ideas. His use of Christian\(^{189}\) and Hebrew\(^{190}\) scripture in his liner notes, as well as his

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\(^{189}\) from the liner notes, “seek and you shall find,” comes from Matthew 7:7

\(^{190}\) The final movement, *Psalm*, is not only titled after Hebrew scripture, but its lyrics, which Coltrane provides in the liner notes, follow the traditional form of ancient Hebrew poetry: Statement of Praise, Confession, and Redemption.
acknowledgement of God as Father, are blended with his reference of the Supreme,\textsuperscript{191} which is a term more akin to Hindu scripture.

Although we have already discussed some of the melodic and programmatic material in \textit{A Love Supreme} earlier, one additional melodic phrase and its chromatic treatment during improvised sections is consistent in approach with all other meditation suites and is therefore worth looking at. As the \textit{A Love Supreme} theme, considered above, utilizes the pitch class intervals 0-3-5 (F-Ab-Bb), Coltrane uses this figure during the improvisation section and transposes it chromatically while retaining its intervallic relationship. Over the course of one minute in his improvisation, Coltrane transposes the motive to all 12 notes of the chromatic scale, which programmatically refers to the omnipresence of \textit{A Love Supreme}, a term that Coltrane uses in the liner notes of this piece to refer to God. This is accomplished through transpositions of a 4\textsuperscript{th} or a half step until all 12 pitches have been exhausted.

\textbf{Example no. 10 – A Love Supreme motive}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example10.png}
\caption{Example no. 10 – A Love Supreme motive}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{191} "...those who, renouncing all actions in Me, and regarding Me as the Supreme, worship Me." - \textit{Bhagavid Gita} 12:6 (see Appendix A for description)
The same motive returns to form the melody in the third movement, *Pursuance*, this time as a fast swing tempo that fits in more with a typical modern jazz tune commonly executed by this ensemble.

**Example no. 11 – *Pursuance from A Love Supreme***

In June 1965, Coltrane’s quartet recorded the *Prayer and Meditation Suite*\(^{192}\), which lasts for 21 minutes and programatically journeys through stages of a daylong prayer. Although this suite does not utilize programmatic motives that are chromatically transposed, as in *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane does use two harmonic ideas that form the foundation for the improvised sections. The main theme that reoccurs throughout the piece, symbolizing prayer, utilizes an F octatonic scale over an Fdim7 chord. It alternates between whole/half and half/whole octatonic scales, but F remains constant as a tonic drone.

**Example no. 12 – *Prayer and Meditation Theme***

\(^{192}\) On the album *Transition* (1965)
### Table no. 3 – Prayer and Meditation Suite

| **Prayer and Meditation: Day -** | The prayer theme in this suite is built around the octatonic scale played by Coltrane. The prayer music is free-tempo sitting on an F diminished harmonic drone by the rhythm section, and it leads seamlessly into a medium swing tempo in 3/4 and in the key of E minor, which Coltrane and the band use as an improvised section depicting meditation. The spiritual ideas expressed are that of structured call to prayer leading into a free-formed period of meditation. |
| **Peace and After -** | Free bass solo. It does not appear as though the bassist (Jimmy Garrison) was given any particular pitches or instruction, but rather Coltrane conceived the kind of peaceful mood to be conveyed naturally by the bass solo. |
| **Prayer and Meditation: Evening -** | Restatement of the octatonic prayer theme and re-entry of the entire band, leading again to a meditation solo section in E minor, this time faster and in 4/4. The pianist, McCoy Tyner, is featured as a soloist in the meditation section. |
| **Affirmation -** | Free drum solo, out of time. |
| **Prayer and Meditation: 4am -** | Return of the octatonic prayer music, again leading to a meditation section in E minor. This final instance of the meditation music is unmistakably Coltrane’s melodic-text recitation language as described earlier in this study, consistent with the form of *A Love Supreme*, which closes in a similar manner with *Psalm*. The final notes of this movement restate the octatonic prayer motive. |

All of the suites were recorded in the course of one year and we hear the band progress from the 4th based minor modal harmony in *A Love Supreme* to atonality in *Meditations*. As each suite becomes progressively closer to an atonal approach, perhaps Coltrane begins to replace the idea of quiet meditation with a kind of complex religious ecstasy in his imagery. What is interesting is that these
works never achieve complete atonality or freedom from traditional structures as some of his later recordings would attempt. Consistent among all four are the presence of diatonic or octatonic melodic fragments that represent spiritual ideas, which are aligned with the title of the movement.

Perhaps the most compositionally advanced example of the 4 suites is *First Meditations*, recorded in September 1965. Returning to the idea of programmatic thematic material, each movement of *First Meditations* is titled after a central point of focus; a common practice in Eastern meditation.

Combining both former approaches of programmatic motivic phrases and scales, *First Meditations* finds Coltrane with more control over the individual parts executed by the quartet. All musicians are provided with the formal structure, melodic, and harmonic material, and each artist improvises using these ingredients. This approach removes the grounding function of the double bass, as his part no longer enforces harmony, but instead works with the melodic material throughout, thereby altering the use of modality and drone that were dominant in earlier years by this ensemble.

**Example no. 14 – First Meditations Suite – I. Love**

Freely, out of time

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Sax

Bass
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In the second movement, *Compassion*, which is an F minor swing groove in 3/4, the bassist appears to be restricted from playing his low F. This would not be as striking for any other band than this classic Coltrane quartet, who became popular with a rendition of *My Favorite Things* (1960) that featured a low E minor drone throughout the entire recording and in the many performances that followed. Coltrane seems to want to avoid repeating this same sound in *Compassion*, as it became all too familiar for the classic Quartet.

**Example no. 15 – First Meditations Suite – II. Compassion**

```
\hline
\text{medium swing}\\
\text{\begin{align*}
 &\text{\{Title\}} \\
 &\text{\{Composer\}}\\
\end{align*}}\\
\hline
```

The third movement, titled “Joy,” is the only one using a major diatonic theme. Beginning in Bb, “Joy” alternates between major scale sonorities and the 4\textsuperscript{th} based chordal movement typical of McCoy Tyner’s approach to comping and soloing. With such a firm tonic, most chromatic notes are the result of expressive multiphonics by Coltrane that sound more like moments of spiritual explorations than harmonic substitutions.

**Example no. 16 – First Meditations Suite – III. Joy**

```
\hline
\text{fast swing}\\
\text{\begin{align*}
 &\text{\{Title\}} \\
 &\text{\{Composer\}}\\
\end{align*}}\\
\hline
```
By far the most atonal movement in the suite is “Consequences,” which begins with an aggressive soundscape by both Coltrane and the drummer, Elvin Jones. With the theme consisting of just two notes, the movement hardly achieves a true harmonic stability. However, it also never strays completely to atonality, as the note D is routinely returned to by the bassist, Jimmy Garrison, and by Tyner throughout.

**Example no. 17 – First Meditations Suite – IV. Consequences**

![Music notation](image)

Although *First Meditations* is mainly a tonal composition, Coltrane and McCoy Tyner (pianist) approach their improvisations with chromatic transpositions of the established motive. All are careful to avoid the tendency to play traditional figures, and the lack of harmonic function or walking bassline helps to achieve this idea. What is interesting is Coltrane’s depiction of Serenity in the last movement, which is anything but serene, but rather jarring and intense. The theme in this movement uses an E# Altered scale\(^{193}\), which is the 7\(^{th}\) mode of an F# melodic minor scale. It begins by emphasizing the diminished region of the scale before moving to the pitches of an F# minor triad, which are found in the mode on scale degrees 2, 4, and 6.

\(^{193}\) also known as the Diminished Whole Tone Scale
Example no. 18 – E# Altered Scale

Example no. 19 – *First Meditations Suite* – V. Serenity

Where the entire band appeared to be of one mind during the recording of *First Meditations*, the second version of the composition titled and released as *Meditations* featured additional members to the band and seemed to throw the piece into a freer, chaotic landscape. With an additional drummer (Rashid Ali) and tenor saxophone (Pharroh Sanders), both of whom were known for more expressive avant-garde style playing, the recording hardly referenced any of Coltrane's preconceived landscapes. Only Coltrane himself would state his programmatic motivic and scalar phrases, which are sometimes barely noticeable in the cacophony of sound. This version of *Meditations* is starkly atonal with only Coltrane's melodies having some semblance of tonality. Other differences include changes to the formal structure in the omitting and reordering of the movements.

The first movement of *Meditations*, titled “The Father and The Son and The Holy Ghost” utilizes a melody from the hymn, “Bless This House, Oh Lord We Pray.” Consistent between the two versions are the chromatic transpositions of the motivic
phrases during Coltrane’s improvised sections. While the rest of the band appears to ignore the structure that Coltrane executes, the atmosphere is an evolved example of the composer utilizing the avant-garde bandstand as a sacred environment for his spiritual ideas and practices. Even while his band gravitates to an increasingly avant-garde approach, Coltrane uses it as an atmosphere to express his spiritual ideas.

**Coltrane’s Other Music**

While most of his pieces dealing with spiritual subject matter are stylistically consistent, a few are the result of experiments and concept albums, which Coltrane favored throughout the last decade of his life. But while these experiments are sometimes seen as a distant departure, they must be viewed in their historical context, as they were created along side the spiritually focused compositions mentioned above. For example, as the album and composition *Ascension*¹⁹⁴ (6/28/65) is regarded as one of the more abstract free jazz albums in Coltrane’s career, its recording date is sandwiched between the *Prayer and Meditation Suite* (6/10/65) and the first recording session of *Meditations* (9/2/65), both of which follow the more stylistic approach established in *A Love Supreme* (12/9/64).

Likewise, the abrasive sounding *Interstellar Space* (2/22/67), which was the final album to be released posthumously, was recorded just days after more spiritually

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¹⁹⁴ The album *Ascension* (1965) in a more generic way implies a spiritual focus, however its approach appears to fall outside the more stylistic spiritual music that was recorded before and after it. *Ascension* is entirely free of any instruction or compositional structure and it seems to reference Ornette Coleman’s album *Free Jazz* (1960) in its use of a large ensemble.
focused compositions from the album *Expression* (2/15/67). At times, selections on *Expression* sound quite similar to *A Love Supreme*.

While recording spiritually focused and experimental pieces in the last three years of his life, Coltrane remained extremely active as a performer; so much so that it is believed that his poor health was related to an intense and stressful lifestyle.\(^{195}\) His live performances were not exclusively avant-garde, including compositions that were popular earlier in his career: “Impressions,” “My Favorite Things,” and occasionally a Jazz standard.\(^{196}\) In his twilight, Coltrane’s work as an artist consisted of his spiritually focused music, experimental avant-garde works, and more standard modern Jazz material in juxtaposition. The notion that Coltrane simply went off the deep-end is refuted by his entire itinerary and creative work from this time, and results from isolating the more abrasive and experimental pieces as sole representatives of later his work. Even from the early 1960’s Coltrane demonstrated a balance and appreciation between the commercial and experimental music and the last years of his life was consistent in this aesthetic.

What remains very significant, however, are neither the non-spiritual experimental or commercial contributions in the final years of his life, but rather the spiritually focused music that the artist spent the most time developing. It is in these later pieces that we find an extensive development of a consistent set of ideas. Alongside other experimental works that deal with outer space\(^{197}\), and more

\(^{195}\) Thomas, p. 214

\(^{196}\) see Coltrane’s live last concert recording: *The Olatunji Concert* (1967)

\(^{197}\) *Stellar Regions* (1967), *Interstellar Space* (1967)
commercially minded performances of pieces made popular earlier in his career, Coltrane’s spiritual compositions are a consistent place of return until his death in mid-1967.

**Conclusion**

With his spiritual music, John Coltrane was impacted by his new devotional practices, which led him to develop a sonic prayer language that appears in his compositions throughout his last years. The quest to discover and impart meaning in his works resulted in abstract melodic-text recitations that were focused on reciting poetry and spiritual ideas. Related to this are verbal recitations by Coltrane and his band members of spiritual texts or sentiments as motives occurring at the beginning and end of pieces. The composer became interested in musical landscapes that represent profound aspects of his spiritual life through the form of large-form programmatic suites. Lastly, Coltrane developed a way for the stage to become a sacred place, where he used his performances as a place for meditation, prayer, and sacramental praise to his God.

Coltrane’s *amen* phrase, its intervallic relationship, and its treatment throughout his final years is quite like another composer who embedded a *cross* motive (scale degrees 1-2-4 or 5-6-8) in several pieces of music over a 30 year span. Franz Liszt’s *cross* motif appears in his *Legend of St. Elizabeth*, composed in the middle of his career, as well as significant works towards the end of his life, such as *Via Crucis*. Our next case study is concerned with this colorful artist whose story is
very different from Coltrane and Pärt, but relevant to this topic of conversion and composition.
chapter five

Franz Liszt: The Abbé
An Enigma in Solitude

A weathered and small upright piano missing the note D sat in a barren room with only a twin-sized bed, a dresser, and a wooden desk along a window offering a view of Vatican City. The pathetic instrument was hardly suitable for a man known to break strings from the sheer force he would apply during his performances. In his earlier years, Franz Liszt was such an aggressive performer that piano manufacturers were forced to design new mechanisms that would tolerate his music, building stronger keyboards that had faster actions capable of the rapid repeated notes that were characteristic of his virtuosic pieces. In his youth he had toured Europe garnishing almost Hollywood-like attention, but having quit the concert stage at age 33, Liszt devoted his life to teaching, conducting, and composing. After such a colorful career and a long residency in Weimar as the music director of the historic city’s orchestra and opera, Liszt took up residence near Rome at the Madonna del Rosario, a Roman Catholic Monastery where he would live from 1863-5. The great enigma had traded in his former life for a place of solitude, performing simple duties like playing the harmonium in unison chant with the monks during prayer times.

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198 Walker, v. 3, p.55
199 Gooley, p. 108-9
200 Walker, v.1, p.316
201 Walker, v.3, p.54
The details behind Liszt's transition from concert legend, composer, and conductor to the withdrawn hermetic Abbé is is full of such tragedy and sensational characters that it reads like 19th century romantic fiction. To summarize the tale, we begin by recalling Liszt's post as music director in Weimar, which produced some of the composer's largest orchestral compositions, as well as the commissioning and premiering of several important works by Wagner and others. Coinciding with his 1861 retirement from Weimar, Liszt and his companion, Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, began an extraordinarily complex process of attempting to marry. They had been living together for about 15 years, but due to the Princess' previous marriage, which was still current in the eyes of the church and the government, she had received absolute resistance. She was of a royal line that would be financially and powerfully affected in the divorce. In order to secure an annulment the Princess needed either her husband to cooperate, or to convince the church that her marriage was never meant to be. And as her husband had benefitted from her royal status and fortune, she found no ally in him.

To complicate matters, Carolyne's daughter, Marie, was only recently married to the brother of an important Catholic Cardinal who rejected the idea of the annulment, as his own kin would thereby lose his claim to the large family estate. The Princess forged political alliances with clergy, moved to Rome, and for several years worked tirelessly, spending much of her fortune in order to annul her marriage. Her plea was heard in person by the Pope himself who finally granted the

\[202 \text{ Lohengrin (1850), Walker, v.2, p.123-6}\]
annullment. But on the very day that the Liszt wedding was to take place in Rome, her relative Cardinal had found a way to have the Pope’s annulment decision overturned.

In 1863 we find Liszt, shaken from his thwarted marriage, resigned from his musical post, and living in solitude in the Madonna de Rosario. To make matters worse, he had only recently lost his son, Daniel, and his second daughter, Blandine, within a span of only a few years, sending Liszt into a state of deep sorrow and withdrawal. Here was Liszt alone, his marriage plans denied by his own church, his youngest children perished, his former artistic community far away and his career halted.

Liszt adapted to the monastery’s quiet atmosphere, which gave him ample time for composing and devotional religious activities, and it helped him to forge a new musical and spiritual direction. It appears as though he was seriously considering positioning himself to become the next music director of the Vatican choir, just as Palestrina had done three centuries before. While some scholars speculate that this venture was a primary concern of Liszt’s, his letters indicate that he was satisfied without the post, as it belonged to a colleague of his who the Pope

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203 A few years later his only surviving child, Cosima, who had been married to a close friend of Liszt’s, Hans Bülow, informed her father of her affair with Richard Wagner, whom she would marry without his blessing causing a painful rift between the family and the two composers.

204 Walker, pp.54-9
had no intention of replacing. What did become important, however, were two precepts that Liszt held from his youth. First, to be influential in the direction of church music through both composing and by challenging the status quo, and second, to fulfill an inner longing to become a priest. The former resulted in a large catalog of sacred works, while the latter led to the composer’s residence in the Vatican for a period of four months, and studying to take the vows of the minor orders of the Roman Catholic Church, thereby becoming Abbé Liszt.

While Liszt had always been a Catholic, the connections between his music and his spirituality were most apparent at three key stages in his life. In the first, the groundwork for Liszt’s musical and religious ideas were formed during a coming-of-age time when the composer was swept by radical religious and political ideas. He resonated deeply with romantic literature that openly addressed

Several scholars have argued that Liszt’s vow to take the minor orders was mainly a political move and that many of the relationships formed in Rome, including the Pope himself, were forged for this purpose. (Merrick, p.87-99) While it seems to be a point of consideration for Liszt, it is highly doubtful that this was a primary goal for him. As a lifelong Catholic, Liszt’s new relationships with Vatican clergy, especially the Pope, Vatican clergy, would have been humbling and meaningful for Liszt the parishioner. The suggestion that Liszt had enacted such a manipulative design as to reside among monks, Vatican brethren, and the Holy See, while also going through the trouble to accept holy vows for political purposes is an idea that would have been entirely out of character for the composer. A look at his letters and other statements of faith (see Liszt’s Will and Testament – 1860) demonstrates that Liszt’s entrée into the Vatican fold was a step of faith and not politics.

Merrick, pp.87-99

Bache, v.2, p.87

Liszt was known to be involved with the socialist Saint-Simonist movement in Paris, among others in his elite community. Although he denies the significance of
spiritual matters, the reform of the Roman Catholic Church, a kind of wild eschatology, and the programmatic fusion of religious matters and abstract art. Liszt’s voice as a pianist and composer came to maturity through his own self-imposed spiritual regimen, which coincided with a mentoring relationship with a

Saint-Simon, the influence appears in Liszt’s writings on the artist’s place in society and the reform of church music in the early 1830’s. (Locke, pp.209-27)

Lamartine’s poetry, which was popular among Parisian elite in the early 19th century, was influential in Liszt’s work. As Lamartine’s writings blended theological concepts with romantic literary styles, Liszt followed suit in his own renderings of the poets’ work through musical form. The examples include Harmonies poétiques et religieuse, Apparitions, and Meditations, all of which are Lamartine’s poetry that Liszt derived solo piano pieces from.

Liszt became particularly interested in the writings of a radical Catholic priest, Lamennais. Known for discourses on the reform of the Roman Catholic Church and theological treatises such as the Essay on Indifference in Matters of Religion, Liszt resonated with the ideas that were important to Lamennais.

One of Lamennais’ seminal works, Words of a Believer (1834) was an eschatological text that used apocalyptic language quite like traditional prophetic Biblical scripture. Liszt was enamored of the work, but it is yet to be explored how exactly his relationship with Lamennais and eschatological ideas influenced his early mature works, which also share a wild and unorthodox nature in their compositional style.

Two solo piano works, Harmonies poétiques et religieuse and Apparitions, are attempts to blend religious literary concepts into more abstract forms. Liszt’s early pieces came out of the 19th century piano-fantasie tradition, but his own twist incorporated religious programmatic ideas. It is an approach altogether unique to Liszt and it is ill explored in scholarship dealing with the composer to this day.

As stated by Liszt himself in 1832, his working method is described in detail:

“For a whole fortnight my mind and my fingers have been working like two lost souls. Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber are all around me. I study them, meditate on them, devour them with fury; besides this, I practice four to five hours of exercises (thirds, sixths, octaves, tremolos, repetition of notes, cadenzas, etc.). Ah! Provided I don’t go mad you will find in me an artist! Yes, an artist . . . such as is required today.” (Bache, v.1, p.8)
censored and excommunicated priest, Felicité Lamennais.\textsuperscript{214} The second point in his life when his spiritual life impacted his compositional approach took place while Liszt was living and working in Weimar. The compositional devices derived from spiritual ideas developed during these years, from 1847-61, remained staples of his music until his death. For example, he began to ascribe certain to certain keys the power to invoke spiritual qualities in the same way that Bach, Handel, and others had done.\textsuperscript{215} He also created reoccurring motives that represented religious ideas, such as the cross of Christ,\textsuperscript{216} and he used them developmentally throughout the rest of his career.\textsuperscript{217} In this approach we are reminded of John Coltrane and Olivier Messian.

The final stage occurred when Liszt retreated from public life, entering solitude at the Madonna del Rosario and later the Vatican. By becoming Abbé Liszt and establishing his new religious identity, the composer's music becomes slower in

\textsuperscript{214} Liszt resonated deeply with Lamennais’ ideas more than any other revolutionary figure that he had previously taken interest in. His relationship with the radical priest is important in the development of Liszt's mature voice as a composer. At Lamennais’ estate in England, Liszt resided for a lengthy summer retreat where he would compose several works, including \textit{Apparitions}, Lyon, and \textit{De Profundis}.

“... for those of us who love you, and who would glory and be proud to be one day called your disciples, we rejoice in it because the world will learn to know you better by this means, and because it will probably be another opportunity for us to show our sympathetic admiration as well as our unalterable devotion for you.” – Liszt to Lamennais (Bache, v.1, p.10)

\textsuperscript{215} Walker, v.2, p.154n

\textsuperscript{216} Liszt's \textit{Crux fidelis}, or the “cross motif”

\textsuperscript{217} Walker, v.2, p.312
harmonic rhythm, his orchestrations change less frequently and become tamer, and his use of harmony and chromaticism breaks from the late 19th century trends that were consistent in his music up to this point. These important changes in Liszt’s style, working method, and compositional intent set the stage for the experimental music that he would create in his late period before his death (1875-86). In other words, Liszt’s musical style becomes “reset” at the point of his conversion, breaking from previous trends and conventions and matching the kind of “derailment” that we have witnessed in both Pärt and Coltrane. This allowed Liszt to break from the 19th century aesthetic and to work out new, and in his view futuristic, compositional ideas. As the composer “[hurled his] lance into the boundless of the future,” his new music demonstrates an evolved use of chromaticism, more akin to 20th century atonality. Its harmony explored the removal of tonal function by using chordal constructions that go beyond a third-based system of harmony. Lastly, Liszt’s new music employed slower formal and developmental processes that were not concerned with contrapuntal or orchestrational variation. Looking back on Liszt from our 21st century vantage point, we can see how his use of non-tonal chromaticism predated Schoenberg’s 12-tone system. We also see how Liszt’s approach to harmony, which at times favors non-functional 4th chords, was akin to Debussy and Bartok. And finally, the sparse contrapuntal and orchestrational approach resembles Satie and later minimalist composers, including Pärt. Upon becoming Abbé Liszt, the composer had stripped away his earlier compositional style, developing a simplified approach that led critics to write that he had “sold out

218 Walker, v.3, p.455
to the church.” Eventually, Liszt’s late music, the majority of it sacred and
programmatic, would lead to the “new rails” that guided the composer to create
some of his most vexing and unique works. To be fair, Liszt’s critics indeed had a
point. To the ear, the great flamboyant virtuoso’s new music was comparatively
simple and even lacking in compositional nuance, but it was perhaps just the thing to
derail the composer and set him searching for a new sound. Establishing this sound
was directly related to his new spiritual identity.

Liszt’s taking of the orders is a step that I am considering to fall within the
definition of a religious conversion as discussed above. Although the composer
does not change “from one religious affiliation to another,” his vows indeed
constitute “an experience of increased devotion within the same religious
framework” and a deeper “commitment to a devout religious life.” Furthermore,
Liszt’s artistic developments follow the pattern of our previous case studies in that
his music changes in profound ways as it became influenced by the composer’s new
devotional life. Taking the orders gave Liszt a point of spiritual focus and
established a new identity that substituted “the piety of [his] youth” for the
worldliness of his celebrity, which the Abbé took seriously for the remainder of his
life. Even after he left the Vatican, he continued to wear the cassock, a priestly
clerical outfit, in all of his professional activities including performances and

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219 Walker, v.3, p.88

220 “conversion ... describes an experience of increased devotion within the same
religious framework, a shift from no religious commitment to a devout religious life,
or a change from one religious affiliation to another.” (Ullman, p.191)

221 Walker, v.3, p.55
teaching engagements. Abbé Liszt lived for another 22 years composing, teaching, and sometimes performing, active and prolific until the very end.

**Abbé Liszt’s Music**

In 1865, when Liszt took up residence at the Vatican for about 4 months, he received the tonsure, which was required of all men entering ecclesiastical studies in the Catholic tradition. From what the composer has indicated in letters, his time in the Vatican was focused on devotional activities that would prepare him to take his vows. For example, he mentions daily morning sessions with a mentor comprised of prayer and readings of St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, a standard manual for the Catholic clergymen. The orders did not require Liszt to take the vow of celibacy, nor would he perform the duties of those who took the full *Holy Orders*, such as administering the Eucharist, hearing confessions, and performing the mass. Liszt was therefore not entering the priesthood as a profession, and while he was living and studying in the Vatican, he continued to write music. Included in the works composed during these months are the *Missa Choralis* and several movements from his magnum opus, *Christus.*

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222 The tonsure is the ceremonial shaving of the head in its very center. (Walker, v.3, p.88)

223 Merrick, p.74

224 Merrick, p.183

225 *ibid*
A comparison between compositions written before and after becoming the Abbé highlights the changes that occurred in Liszt’s compositional approach. By exploring works from different eras setting the same religious texts, Liszt’s compositional changes become apparent. As suggested, Liszt’s derailment gave the composer a break from the language of late 19th century European music, and it resulted in a rather restrained approach to harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. For example, in the passage below (Example #1 - *Pater Noster II*, 1860), written 5 years before his taking of the orders, the composers’ use of counterpoint employs a fugal 4-voice polyphonic approach. In contrast, the same text setting composed 4 years after his conversion shows Liszt abandoning polyphony altogether and instead favoring a homophonic approach throughout the entire work (Example #2 – *Pater Noster III* 1869). In Example #1, observe the entrances in the voices beginning in the alto voice at m.40, followed by the soprano, bass, tenor, and keyboard in succession. Each voice, although not strictly fugal, begins its phrase in response to the preceding one while retaining contrapuntal independence. At letter E, the tenor voice begins a phrase that is treated in a stricter fugal manner as it is repeated at different intervals in the soprano, bass, and alto voices respectively. As is typical in polyphonic writing, Liszt’s approach to harmony stems from the result of the sum of the contrapuntal lines, which accounts for the sense of constant intervallic movement throughout as the harmony rarely pauses for a moment of stasis.
Example #1 - *Pater Noster II* (1860), mm.39-65
In contrast to the above example, the later setting of *Pater Noster* is devoid of a contrapuntal approach in the SATB voices, instead favoring homophony throughout. As a result, we hear a greater sense of harmonic stasis.\textsuperscript{226}

**Example #2 - *Pater Noster III* (1869), mm.1-18**

Another pair of examples reveals the same trend. In comparing two different settings of the traditional text, *Ave Maria*, where the before-conversion approach utilizes polyphony (Example #3) and the after-conversion music is homophonic (Example #4), we notice just how pervasive his style change was. Both examples below are taken from the beginning of the respective *Ave Maria* settings. In the first

\textsuperscript{226} One difference in the *Pater Noster* comparisons occurs in the languages used. The first example is set in German while the second is set in the traditional Latin. While setting text may alter some compositional decisions dealing with lyricism and text painting, it should not have much affect on the composers’ contrapuntal approach.
setting, Liszt is interested in building a polyphonic texture through gradual addition of independent voices. In second setting, his focus has turned once again to homophony.

Example #3 - *Ave Maria I* (1842), mm.1-7

Example #4 - *Ave Maria II* (1869), mm.1-21
Another obvious difference between Liszt’s music after taking his orders is noticed in his restraint in orchestrational variation and brevity with formal structures. This is again particularly noticeable in compositions where the same texts are in play. For example, in *Pater Noster II*, Liszt’s setting of the word “Amen” lasts for a total of two pages, as the composer repeats the word with harmonic variations, ultimately ending the piece in a climactic manner. In the 1869 version of *Pater*, Liszt simply sets the “amen” only once, providing no development or variation. His use of range during these two examples demonstrates how, prior to his conversion, his approach to orchestration favored exploring the timbral color and extremities of available range, in contrast with his later music, which does not utilize the same liberties. In Example #5 below, observe the wide range used from the bottom of the bass voice (low Ab) to the extreme top of the soprano range (high Ab). The analogous point in the later setting (Example #6) finds the soprano voice at a remarkably low tessitura that it does not even allow for the richness in tone normally achieved or desired in the soprano voices. These examples are again indicative of Liszt’s change in approach, pervasive not only throughout the entire works considered here, but also throughout the two stylistic periods.
Perhaps one of the most significant developments in Liszt's later music is his use of melody and harmony, which gradually changes from conventional late 19th century chromaticism, employing a rather fast harmonic rhythm through chromatically moving polyphony, to slower harmonic rhythm where single voice chromaticism tends to obscure tonal leanings. A look at three different settings of the *Agnus Dei* highlights these changes.
Composed in 1847, the *Szekszárd Mass* is typical of Liszt's Weimar-era harmonic approach, which fits in nicely to the conventions of 19th century romantic harmony. An analysis demonstrates that the harmonic rhythm is moving at about 2 chords per measure, with each voice having equal contrapuntal weight, sometimes featuring the bass and sometimes tenor or soprano. Chromatic notes that appear are either neighbor tones, pitches belonging to secondary dominants, or belonging to neighboring and closely related keys. Nothing in the passage below (Example #7) is atypical for Liszt or other composers of this time.
Example #7 - *Agnus Dei* from Szekszard Mass (1847), beginning, mm.1-21

**Agnus Dei.**

**Em:**

\[ \text{I}\text{vii}^6 \quad 4 \quad \text{i}\text{6} \quad \text{vii}^6/\text{V} \quad \text{V}_6 \quad \text{ii}\text{6} \quad \text{vii}^5 \quad \text{iv}\text{6} \quad \text{vii}^5 \ldots \text{vi} \text{v}_6 \]

\[ V_6 (b9)/\text{iv} \quad \text{IV} \quad V_6 (b9)/\text{iv} \quad \text{III} \quad \text{i} \quad \text{vi}\text{i}\text{6} \quad \text{V} \quad \text{V} \quad \text{v}_6 \]

\[ \Rightarrow \text{gm:} \text{v}_6 \]

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Several years later, while residing in the Vatican, Liszt set the *Agnus Dei* again in the context of his *Missa Choralis* (1865). This setting finds Liszt's harmonic rhythm to be slower than the previous example, where each chord moves roughly at a rate of one per bar, or even less. Although the harmony employed is not atypical for its time, when compared to the former example, the tonal weight appears to favor a slow suspension-release movement in place of the dominant-tonic approach used in the Szekszárd Mass. Another significant development in Liszt's approach is exemplified by the very end of the passage below (Example #8), in the ascending chromatic line in the bass voice. While the eye may miss such a passage, the ear hears this solo chromatic line as a bit jarring due to the way that the sequence of chromatic pitches obscures the feeling of tonal center. After a few solo chromatic notes, the ear seems to forget its home, which provides the composer with the ability to land on almost any note with an element of surprise. While seemingly simple, this new chromaticism became the basis of Liszt's later music that attempts to obscure any tonal center or melodic weight.
Example #8 - *Agnus Dei* from Missa Choralis (1864), beginning, mm.1-23

VI. *Agnus Dei.*

Dm: $i$ Gm: VI\textsuperscript{4}-3 III i\textsuperscript{6} vi\textsuperscript{b6} Fr\textsuperscript{+} Fr \ V\textsuperscript{6}-5

ii\textsuperscript{b6} V\textsuperscript{7} ii\textsuperscript{b4} V\textsuperscript{7(b9)} i\textsuperscript{6} V\textsuperscript{7(b9)} vi\textsuperscript{b6}/\textsuperscript{5} V V\textsuperscript{b6}-5
In an even later setting of the *Agnus Dei* (1871), the composer explores his new use of melodic chromaticism from the very beginning of the movement, when no tonal center has been established yet. When the ensemble enters *tutti*, the ear has no way to expect the chord chosen by the composer. As a result, there is very little tonal leaning or weight, as there would be in standard 19th century chromatic harmony. Notice also how the harmonic rhythm in the example below is significantly slower, which is typical of his late works. Liszt continues to demonstrate a gradual transition to slower harmonic movement, sparse orchestrational and contrapuntal change, and chromatic movement that is sometimes void of common practice tonal melodic or harmonic weight.
Example #9 - *Agnus Dei* from *Requiem* (1871), beginning, mm.1

**Nº 5. Agnus Dei.**

F Maj: vi ---------------------------- IV  IV₆  N₆ (=> Gb)

Gb Maj: vi ---------------------------- IV(Gb => F#)  IV₆
Abbé Liszt's Late Music (1875-86)

Liszt began to understand that he was embarking on an unexplored musical journey, one that would sound foreign to 19th century ears. Many of his most experimental late works were never performed in his lifetime, let alone published. Via Crucis (1879), a sacred work that follows the 14 stations of the cross of Christ, was rejected by publishers during his lifetime, and it was not until 1929 that it saw its premiere. Confronted with these obstacles, Liszt consciously made the decision to continue to explore the new music that he was developing, coming to the realization that he was actually writing for another era and that it was unreasonable to expect 19th century ears to accept it. He therefore stopped concerning himself with public performances, and as a result, began to employ more liberal versions of the techniques that arose during his derailment. Via Crucis contains all of the previously explored compositional devices in their evolved state, thereby providing us with the best example of how the composer's late music was conceived. In his late musical style, Liszt looked toward a 20th century approach, employing non-functional chordal movement, often utilizing quartal harmony. Similarly, his rate of orchestrational variation and harmonic rhythm proceeded at an extremely slow rate. While he had always been an enigma, Liszt was now in many ways ahead of his time.

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227 Walker, v.3, p.456

228 Merrick, p.250

229 Merrick, p.251
Consisting of several movements without key signature, a device that the composer had been exploring since his youth, Via Crucis is perhaps the most sophisticated multi-movement example of Liszt’s late experimentalism. In Station IV of Via Crucis the composer attempts a dodecaphonic approach, albeit rather different than Schoenberg’s 12-tone system. Where Schoenberg sought to abandon all of the weight and function of tonality, Liszt used a device in Station IV where the exclusion of one pitch would set the ear up for hearing its significance when it eventually enters the fray. In the passage below (Example #9), 11 chromatic pitches are exhausted in the first phrase, leaving only the note D out. As the piece progresses, D is consistently absent, but when it finally does appear in m.18, its arrival is heard as significant to the ear. Liszt frames the note by voicing it at the top of the register and as the third of a triad, and he uses its arrival to begin a new section. The ascending chromatic lines are similar in approach to the Agnus Dei examples, only here they are expanded even more in their exploration of the chromatic scale. Liszt’s use of harmony to accompany the chromatic melodic notes favors 4th based chords where chromatic melodies and inner voices may move more freely than 3rd based harmony.

\[230\] In particular, Harmonies poétiques et religieuse (1834). Liszt described this work in letters as his “little Lamartine harmony without key or time.” (Merrick, p.281) Incredibly original for its time, the piece begins without a key signature, time signature, or tempo indication, which required the composer to invent a notational system to deal with the frequent time signature changes.
Example #10 - *Via Crucis* (1879), Station IV

Station IV.
Jesus begegnet seiner heiligen Mutter.
Other significant features of Liszt's late works are observed in his minimalist approach to orchestration, formal development, and harmonic rhythm. For a composer who had always valued virtuosity, thick and varied orchestrations, and rapid harmonic movement, the changes he implements are quite startling. On some occasions, Liszt's late harmonic development is limited to the slow addition or subtraction of just one note. In Example #11 below, the dirge-like accompaniment gradually alters one pitch at a time of an established chord, sometimes adding notes and creating a sum of cluster sonorities. Against a harmonically stagnant
background, the ear notices these gradual and subtle changes and it becomes interested in the tension built through this process setup by the composer.

A similar approach is found in the solo piano work *In Festo Transfigurations Domini nostri Jesu Christi* (1880) where a stagnant arpeggiated chordal passage is set against a slowly moving diatonic bassline. The ear hears what is usually an accompaniment passage as foreground while each subtle and slow change becomes interesting and apparent (Example #12).

**Example #11 - Via Crucis (1879), Station XI, mm.1-9**

![Sheet Music Example #11](image-url)
It is remarkable how entire passages in Liszt’s late works contain surprisingly few orchestrational variations, as the composer became less interested in changes in timbre than he had been before. In Station II of Via Crucis, the solo piano part is committed to a compositional process where the only changes to the sonic landscape occur in the slow harmonic movement. (Example #13) Again, what would appear to be an accompaniment part sounds like the foreground to the ear.
Example #13 - *Via Crucis* (1879), Station II, mm.20-36

**Conclusion**

In the midst of a rich and prolific career, Liszt began incorporating infusing his religious and devotional practices into his compositional process as he made a deeper commitment to his Catholic faith. In becoming Abbé Liszt, his personal and spiritual transformations had creative consequences that resulted in a break from the trends in 19th century romantic music, sending the composer into a state of derailment in search of new ways of composing. In the first years of taking the minor orders of the Roman Catholic Church, Liszt’s music demonstrates a restrained
approach to chromaticism, harmony, harmonic rhythm, and orchestration, and
these changes free the composer to look beyond 19th century trends that his earlier
music was concerned with. The result was a significant body of experimental music
that in many ways foreshadowed the harmonic aesthetic of the 20th century in its
use of non-functional chromaticism, 4th based chordal harmony, slow development,
and the quest for a melodic approach utilizing all 12 chromatic pitches without tonal
function.
chapter six

conclusion
While the objective of this dissertation was not to develop rigid theories or discover a kind of “post-conversion” music, it is nevertheless interesting to observe the similarities in the musical conclusions that our three composers arrived at. As Liszt, Coltrane, and Pärt represent three different religious faiths, spanning two centuries of music, their music could not be more different. And yet, several interesting parallels can be drawn as each composer adopts similar compositional techniques in their new music. Although the song of the convert is not simply one kind of music, after studying this topic I am left to conclude that if these three composers were able to sit together at a table to discuss their work, their newfound compositional approaches, and the meaning behind and purpose for their music, they would quickly see eye to eye.

All Three Composers

In previous chapters I wrote about a kind of artistic derailment that occurred for as conversion thrust the composer from a previously established set of tracks in search of new rails.\textsuperscript{231} Pärt’s derailment is perhaps the most obvious, as the composer took several years off from writing and entered a period of self imposed creative silence. He then reemerged, after some experimentation, on a new set of rails with a very carefully developed musical system: Tintinnabulation. Coltrane’s quest was noticeable throughout his career, as the artist experimented with new musical ideas with each new studio recording. While his new musical style was

\textsuperscript{231} See Chapter 3: Arvo Pärt, pp. 2-3
formed through this process of experimentation, it led to a substantial body of stylistically consistent music. For Liszt, the most important derailment occurred as he took the minor orders of the Catholic Church and began to reject colorful orchestrations and late 19th century chromaticism, opening the door for his more harmonically experimental and minimalistically static music. With all three artists we indeed found that their religious conversion was followed by an artistic derailment and subsequent new musical style.

It may be interesting to compare how, at times, Pärt’s music takes a similar approach to Coltrane, or Liszt, or vice versa. Equally intriguing is the comparison of the ideas that are consistent between all three. For example, all make use of traditional religious repertoire, or hymnody, as programmatically symbolic of important elements of their faith. Coltrane used a hymn, Bless this House, O Lord We Pray, in his abstract composition, “The Father and The Son and The Holy Ghost” (1966).232 Liszt used Bach’s O Sacred Head Now Wounded, framed between almost atonal experimental harmonic passages in his Via Crucis (1879), and Pärt also used passages by Bach in his first religious composition Credo (1968). To highlight programmatic motifs, all three composers make use of bitonality as a compositional technique. Coltrane, who makes the most frequent use of this technique in A Love Supreme (1964), Prayer and Meditation Suite (1965), and Meditations (1965), uses bitonality by transposing motives that represent a particular sentiment, often spiritually focused, during improvised moments in his compositions. Pärt uses

232 There are other examples of this idea from Coltrane, such as Reverend King.
bitonality in a very different way in *Fratres* (1978) in order to expand harmonic possibilities within the parameters of his Tintinnabuli language. And Liszt, whose use of bitonality would have been the most unorthodox, uses the technique in *Schlaflos!, Frage und Antwort* (1883),\(^{233}\) to represent the manic movements of an insomniac.

In juxtaposing atonality with tonality, or in using multiple diatonic tonal centers, the composers all use a device that allows a sacred idea to float atop chaos. Coltrane's transpositions of sacred phrases to multiple tonal centers against a harmonically stagnant backdrop allows him to mimic the way the form that his meditative practices may have taken, especially they involved repeated recitations at varying levels of emotion. Pärt's technique of layering two unrelated scales that share the same tonal center provides a way for the composer to achieve a more expanded sense of dissonance and resolution over a constant tonic drone. This is similar to Orthodox meditative prayer, as the chordal phrases resemble the repetitive chant of the believer, and the constant drone draws to mind a peaceful spiritual presence that the mystics have described. For Liszt, who nearing the end of his life became troubled and anxious to the point of insomnia,\(^{234}\) bi-tonality represents an enigma calling out in a land that does not understand him, like a prophet who is at tension with the community around him.

\(^{233}\) *Sleepless, Question and Answer, Insomnia*

\(^{234}\) *Walker, v.3, pp.403-16*
**Arvo Pärt and Franz Liszt**

Though there is no evidence of Pärt ever hearing Liszt’s late works before forming his Tintinnabuli style, there are some striking similarities between the composers. Some passages found in Liszt’s late compositions could easily be mistaken for Pärt, as Liszt appears to take a similar approach in juxtaposing static triadic voices against moving diatonic melodic lines that create cluster harmony. For example, Liszt’s *Sancta Dorothea* (1877) utilizes Pärt’s Tintinnabuli-like approach throughout, only Liszt changes tonal centers multiple times, transposing these passages to several keys, where Pärt would refrain from such a move.

**Example #1 – *Sancta Dorothea*, mm.4-7**

Liszt’s passages contain both a static Tintinnabuli voice, fixed to pitches in the tonic triad, alongside 2 melodic voices traveling diatonically stepwise in thirds. Liszt’s approach here is quite similar to Pärt’s *Pari Intervallo* where the bass and inner

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\(^{235}\) As the discovery, publication, and performance of Liszt’s late music did not appear in the west until the mid-20th century, it would have been unlikely for the music to be available in Soviet Estonia. Also, Pärt credits early classical music, such as Palestrina, Perotin, and Josquin (among many others) as important in the development of his Tintinnabuli style. He never mentions Liszt as an influence.
melodic voices travel in parallel 10ths throughout (starting in m.3) against Tintinnabuli triadic lines.

Example #2 – *Pari Intervallo, mm.1* -

A similar approach used by Pärt is found in *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978) where the two melodic voices travel in parallel 6ths throughout (outer voices of the right hand arpeggios) against triadic Tintinnabuli tones (inner voice of the right hand). In *Spiegel*, the register, voicing, and perpetual triadic motion in the right hand all resemble Liszt’s *Sancta*.

Example #3 – *Spiegel im Spiegel, mm. 7-18*
Although one may point out that Liszt’s use of harmony is not very remarkable or unusual, passing for a simplistic suspension-resolution diatonicism, a closer look reveals that the composers’ Tintinnabuli-like passages are actually concerned with creating dissonance and resolution through the cluster chords that are the result of stepwise voices clashing with the fixed tonic triad. Like Pärt, this approach sets up a language where simple diatonicism remains interesting to the ear and has fluidity without the need for traditional dominant-tonic tonal constructions. If Liszt were interested in traditional tonality, as he was more inclined to utilize earlier in his career, he could have altered the inner Tintinnabuli-like voices to instead create more dissonance in order to give the harmony the implied weight that common-practice tonality requires.

Aside from the presence of a Tintinnabuli-like approach, some of Liszt’s music is similar in the minimalistic aesthetic that Pärt and other modern composers are known for. In In Festo Transfigurationis Domini nostri Jesu Christi (1880), a work that is remarkably sparse in orchestrational change, Liszt again uses a Tintinnabuli-like approach as the left hand plays a stepwise melodic line while the right hand is fixed to an arpeggiated static triad.
In the absence of a true melody, and in drawing the ear directly to the static arpeggiated triads as foreground throughout the piece, *In Festo* sounds like a modern minimalist piece akin to Pärt or Phillip Glass.

Liszt’s late music, however, is not like Pärt’s in his attempt to invent a chromatic system of harmony that removes the weight of tonal center. Where Pärt’s music is an obvious look to centuries in the past, Liszt was concerned with hurling his “lance into the boundless future.”236 And while both composers have examples of music where harmonic stasis is important, Liszt’s melodies generally move faster, and his harmonic rhythm, while slower in comparison to his earlier works, is still faster than Pärt’s approach.

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236 Walker, v.3, p.455
John Coltrane and Franz Liszt

As mentioned in chapter 4, John Coltrane and Franz Liszt both assigned programmatic spiritual sentiments to musical phrases. This allowed them to use their music making process as a form of worship, helping to transform spiritual ideas into concrete compositional devices. For Liszt, his system was elaborate, spanning several decades of compositions, including keys that represented spiritual qualities, experimental techniques like removal of key, tonal center, tempo and time signature, and motives that represented individual Biblical characters or the cross of Christ. Liszt’s cross motive can be found in his works from as early as 1853, and he used it in his compositions until his death. Unlike Coltrane, Liszt tells us exactly that the phrase in question represents the cross. Coltrane, on the other hand, lets us know only through his music that a phrase rather similar to Liszt’s cross represents a word of praise or a musical symbol for amen. Both Liszt’s cross and Coltrane’s amen bear a striking resemblance.

Example #7 – Liszt’s Cross Motif and Coltrane’s Amen Phrase in Pitch Class Intervals

![Example #7 – Liszt’s Cross Motif and Coltrane’s Amen Phrase in Pitch Class Intervals](image)


238 crux fidelis
Although the bones of the *cross* motif and the *amen* phrases are quite simple, both composers arrive at its pitch makeup for the same reason. First, in choosing a simple phrase, each composer needed to select something versatile that would fit into many musical contexts. The phrase needed to be short and melodic, but recognizable. As both versions are akin more to a stacking of perfect 4ths, or rather, as both may be harmonized by chords that emphasize 4ths, the phrases avoid a triadic sonority that would be easily lost in diatonic music. Likewise, a phrase emphasizing perfect 4ths retains a sense of melodicism that a more dissonant collection of pitches would obscure. Liszt’s and Coltrane’s phrases fit each others’ needs quite appropriately. For Liszt, the phrase is developed motivically in the style of 19th century tonal music, which includes melodic developments, harmonizations, and transpositions. For Coltrane, the phrase is used primarily at the beginning and end of pieces as a frame, while also occasionally used as a motif for improvisation that the artist transposes and develops. Consistent between both composers is that their phrases are used as a technique to bring a spiritual message or a point of focus into more abstract works. Simply put, Liszt and Coltrane share the idea of developing a repertoire of phrases and musical ideas that hold spiritual meaning for the artists, and it helps them to fuse their devotional practices with their compositional process.
**John Coltrane and Arvo Pärt**

Our two 20\textsuperscript{th}-century composers demonstrate a common compositional device that allows each to use meaningful text in a rather obscure way. For John Coltrane, his *text-recitation* technique formed a melodic, almost blues-like quality within the context of dense and avant-garde music. It provided the saxophonist with a way to state something meaningful to him, thinking the very words of the texts as he executed them on the bandstand and helped him to make new music with specific spiritual connotations. For Pärt, in setting prayers and religious literature instrumentally while using the syllabic form of a religious text as a melodic guide, his approach was similar to Coltrane’s, as it allowed him to emphasize spiritual ideas in the same way. Although Liszt does not use the same compositional device, we do find him using religious literature as a programmatic source in his compositions.\(^{239}\)

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\(^{239}\) *Harmonies poetique et religious* (1834) and *Apparitions* (1835) are both poems by Lamartine with spiritual ideas.
What is the Song of the Convert?

While the connections in compositional devices and creative approaches of our three composers do not reveal concrete or universal findings, the musical trends that ensued as a result of a religious conversion are similar enough to acknowledge a kind of harmony. When considered as a whole, the song of the convert is a unique approach that transcends historical epoch or musical style. Although the song is unlike the converts’ previous music, it often looks back to generations from the past for guidance in assembling the new music. It uses spiritual ideas and religious texts as source material for motivic phrases and programmatic ideas, thereby helping the convert in thinking of his new art as a vehicle for worship. Spiritual texts are sometimes set to music and sometimes recited instrumentally so that the listener may not hear them, but their impact retains its grandeur with speech-like melodic lines. The convert uses harmonic devices like bitonality, 4th based chords, and a kind of diatonicism that favors tonal clusters, which create dissonance in place of the weight implied by 3rd-based traditional tonal harmony. Its purpose for this new harmony is partly to adopt a tonal landscape where metaphysical concepts are properly represented, and party to bring special attention to key phrases that are locked with meaning for the composer. Upon facing a new set of beliefs, coming to grips with spirituality that for the artist is profoundly impacting, the convert is convinced that his previous work did not properly reflect, through sound, these newfound spiritual mysteries, and he is therefore constantly on a quest for a language that will abstractly portray metaphysical ideas where mere words fail to communicate. At times slow, and at times abrasive; melancholy then exuberant;
ghostly then shimmeringly bright; the song of the convert explores the depths of religious stories that generations have resonated with, imploring the artist to create music that is just as historical as it is timeless.

Perhaps this dissertation will guide our ears in being alerted to a kind of music written by composers who share a similar story. It is conceivable that in having our perceptions opened to the unique compositional devices common to our case studies, we may also hear other composers who work through parallel ideas, searching for music where their faith, spiritual practices, and religious traditions are expressed in meaningful ways on the concert stage.
Appendix - John Coltrane’s Personal Booklist:

Religious Texts:

A Search for God, E. Cayce – 20th century psychic and Universalist

Autobiography of a Yogi - Paramhansa Yogananda – 1946 book that was popular for introducing westerners to yoga and Hindu meditation.

Bhagavid Gita – Ancient Hindu scripture


Light on the Path, M. Collins – Late 19th Century book inspired by Indian Buddhism.


Psalms, Hebrew Bible (Old Testament Scripture)

Sefer Yetzirah, - Kabbalah scripture, 13th Century Jewish Mysticism

Treatise of Oneness – Sufi, 18th Century Islamic Mysticism

Zohar – Kabbalah scripture, 13th Century Jewish Mysticism

Music Books:

Book of American Negro Spirituals, Traditional – Coltrane derived the melody from Spiritual from this source.

School of Virtuosity, Czerny

Since Debussy, A. Hodier

Studies in High Harmonics, T. Nash

Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns, N. Slonimsky – Book of complex scales and patterns.

Top Tones for the Saxophone, S. Rascher

Virtuoso Pianist, Hanon
Philosophy, Physics, Art, and Astronomy:

*Astronomy Made Simple*

Biography of Van Gogh (unknown which one)

*Commentaries on Living, J. Krishnamurti – 1956 book on Eastern philosophy*


*Philosophy Made Simple*

*Universe and Dr. Einstein, L. Barnett – 1957 book on relativity theory.*
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*Blue Train*, Blue Note, September 15, 1957

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*Crescent*, Impulse, April 27, June 1, 1964

*A Love Supreme*, Impulse, December 9-10, 1964

*John Coltrane Quartet Plays*, Impulse, February 17-18, 1965

*Transition*, Impulse, May 26, June 10, June 16, 1965

*Living Space*, Impulse, June 16, 1965

*Kulu se Mama*, Impulse, June 16-18, October 14, 1965.

*Ascension*, Impulse, June 28, 1965

*A Love Supreme “Live,”* Impulse, July 26, 1965

*Sun Ship*, Impulse, August 26, 1965

*First Meditations*, Impulse, September 2 and 22, 1965

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