Routledge Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts

COMPOSING CHRIST'S PASSION

MUSIC AS THEOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

Sarah Moerman

Composing Christ's Passion

This book provides an account of the differing theologies and compositional approaches of three current composers—James MacMillan, Arvo Pärt, and John Adams. It contributes a comparative theological and musical analysis of their work through case studies of three of their major compositions.

The first part establishes the role of faith in James MacMillan's musical inspiration, investigating how the suffering and death of Christ are direct and indirect themes in much of his work. It presents a close reading of *St Luke Passion* (2012), demonstrating how MacMillan uses music both as a theological practice of his faith and as a means to communicate theological meaning. The second part considers Arvo Pärt and how his Estonian religious and political formation influenced his compositional style. It presents a brief Orthodox theology of the icon and argues that Pärt—as a composer—acts as an Orthodox iconographer and that his *Passio* (1989) can be read and heard as an 'aural icon'. The third part reframes the music of self-identified agnostic composer John Adams. It demonstrates how his music still provides theological insight, precipitating the possibility of God revealing something of himself to seekers, as well as compelling believers to interrogate their own theological assumptions. The author examines in detail *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* (2012), a contemporary reimagining of Christ's Passion through the eyes of women and ethnic minorities.

The volume contributes comprehensive musical examples of how proposed methodological frameworks might be applied, arguing that different compositional styles and different faith backgrounds necessitate different musical and theological lenses. It will be of interest to scholars of both theology and music.

Sarah Moerman is a research fellow in theology and music at the University of St Andrews, UK.

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What have imagination and the arts to do with theology? For much of the modern era, the answer has been 'not much'. It is precisely this deficit that this series seeks to redress. For, whatever role they have or have not been granted in the theological disciplines, imagination and the arts are undeniably bound up with how we as human beings think, learn and communicate, engage with and respond to our physical and social environments and, in particular, our awareness and experience of that which transcends our own creatureliness. The arts are playing an increasingly significant role in the way people come to terms with the world; at the same time, artists of many disciplines are showing a willingness to engage with religious or theological themes. A spate of publications and courses in many educational institutions has already established this field as one of fast-growing concern.

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To my dad, my first theology teacher
and my mom, my first music teacher


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Figures

Introduction

As the old adage goes, 'writing about music is like dancing about architecture' Why on earth should someone even attempt such nonsense? However, many writers and musicians might assert, with Joel Heng Hartse, that 'dancing about architecture is a reasonable thing to do'.[1] It is music's inherently abstract nature that lends itself to the absurd endeavour of attempting to understand something of the ineffable. Emily Dickinson, through her poetry, understands this sideways approach. 'Tell all the truth but tell it slant. . . . The truth must dazzle gradually/Or every man be blind', she says.[2] It is the purpose of this book to consider how music is particularly apt for allowing Truth to dazzle gradually.

What if music—not lyrics, not libretto, not text, but *music itself*—could be a starting point for theological engagement? What if music did not just illustrate points of doctrine, serve as a convenient teaching tool, or be merely an accessory to worship—but was its own mode of enacting or expressing theology? In the contemporary theological landscape, music increasingly emerges not simply as a medium for conveying doctrinal ideas but also as a site in which theology itself might begin. When words falter or prove insufficient, music can articulate what doctrine leaves unsaid. This is particularly true in musical settings of the Passion, where composers are compelled not only to set a familiar narrative but also to sound its weight, its mystery, and its theological depth. This book begins with the conviction that music in and of itself has the capacity to generate theological meaning and provide a means for divine revelation.

To investigate this claim, this book explores how three composers—James MacMillan, Arvo Pärt, and John Adams—engage the Passion of Christ not only as subject matter but also as theological inquiry, artistic provocation, and personal expression. Through a close, comparative reading of their Passion settings—MacMillan's *St Luke Passion* (2012), Pärt's *Passio* (1989), and Adams' *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* (2012)—I examine how music becomes an arena where theological conviction, spiritual searching, and artistic innovation intersect.

Although musical settings of Christ's Passion are generally classified as 'sacred music' because of the scriptural content and traditional liturgical use,

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the three Passion settings considered here were composed not for the liturgy but for the concert hall. In a secular setting, removed from the structures and expectations of formal liturgy, MacMillan, Pärt, and Adams are all seeking to speak not just to their own confessional or ideological communities, but instead to transcend confessional boundaries. In doing so, they nonetheless seek to communicate something of their own faith, or their questions about faith, to a predominantly secular audience. In closely attending to these three different composers and the relationship between their faith and their music, I seek to draw out the implications of their own theological and musical approaches for the interdisciplinary field of theology and music as a whole.

I am *not* interested, however, in offering another systematic 'theology of music'—an exhaustive account that would presume to encompass all traditions or aesthetics within Western art music, let alone music globally. Instead, I trace the theologies that emerge from within the works themselves—from compositional choices, aesthetic forms, and questions posed. These are not incidental theologies; they are embedded, even if not always articulated, in the music's structure and affect. The Passion, in each case, becomes a lens through which theological reflection is enacted, not merely depicted. In such a critical dialogue between the *particular* (three specific composers, and a focus on one theological-musical genre, the Passion) and the more *universal* (theologies of music), a sense of the strengths, and potential limitations, of prominent approaches becomes evident. What emerges from the Passion settings of these three composers is therefore not a single 'theology of music' but a plurality of distinctive theological methods shaped by each composer's spiritual framework and compositional language.

In the early twenty-first century, the interdisciplinary field of theology and music has developed in rapid and diverse ways, probing, for example, music's capacity to communicate something of the divine, or theology's capacity to inform musical production or reception. Although scholarly discourse about music and theology traditionally had tended to converge most naturally in the liturgy, in what is usually understood to be 'sacred music', the field broadened in manifold directions in the late twentieth century, with the investigation of some of the theological questions posed by music, and exploration of musical analyses that explicitly engage, or are deeply informed by, theology. Rather than recapitulating summaries of various approaches here, however, I will instead outline two broad approaches that—although sometimes perceived to be at odds with each other—have both been particularly influential, in different ways, on this book.[3] However, as will become evident, I have drawn on different aspects of each approach in light of the differing theological sensibilities and compositional languages of MacMillan, Pärt, and Adams.

The first approach might be termed 'music as an exponent of theology'. In this approach, theologians apply music as a means of expounding or clarifying theological doctrine. This approach 'insists that the divine norms accessible to us are all essentially verbal and God-given as such—even if music can

suggest to theology some creative ways of conceptualizing such doctrines'.[4] These normative bounds are held exclusively in Scripture and classic Christian doctrine.[5] Thus, although this approach lends new insight and fresh perspectives giving both the opportunity for theological reflection as well as enriching musicological study, it depends on a pre-determined set of doctrines or beliefs that music can help interpret. The scholar at the forefront of this approach is Jeremy Begbie, who has brought the interdisciplinary field of theology and music into greater prominence over the last twenty years. For Begbie, music offers a valid and distinctive means of cognitive access to the world. Questioning what it might mean 'to theologise not simply *about* music, but *through* music', Begbie investigates the ways that music might serve and enhance theology.[6] Directing his attention to the temporal aspect of music in particular in *Theology, Music, and Time*, he argues that

> Music offers us a particular form of participation in the world's temporality and in so doing, we contend, it has a distinctive capacity to elicit something of the nature of this temporality and our involvement with it (as well as question many misleading assumptions about it). Here we try to show how the experience of music can serve to open up features of a distinctively *theological* account of created temporality, redeemed by God in Jesus Christ, and what it means to live in and with time as redeemed creatures.[7]

Through music, Begbie explores theological themes such as anticipation, tension and resolution, hope and eschatology, freedom and musical improvisation, and the nature of the Trinity. In drawing Christian theology and music together, he underlines two dangers: first, that this can result in a sort of theological 'imperialism', of imposing a particular set of dogmas on music and, second, that this can lead to needless abstraction in theology: 'talking *about* God rather than engaging *with* God'.[8] His overarching approach, however, is informed by theological presuppositions and a deep faith in God revealed in and through Jesus Christ:

> [M]y intention throughout has been to allow the ultimate 'pressure of interpretation' to come not from musical practice considered in and of itself (as some kind of autonomous, normative arbiter), but from a focus on the activity of the triune God, definitely disclosed in Jesus Christ, whose purpose is the participation of the world—including music—in his own triune life.[9]

Although Begbie's approach anchors itself strongly in Christian theology, it has been criticised somewhat unfairly for simply using music as a tool or lens through which to clarify or expound these doctrines, when it is clearly much more sophisticated and rich than such a reductionist account would suppose.[10] In drawing on this first, rich seam of theological-musical analysis,

I am doing so in a broad sense: exploring how music may embody and communicate theological doctrines, as well as central elements of religious and faith experience. It still seems right, nonetheless, to identify this first approach with what Begbie himself has called, while underlining caveats with the phrase—particularly if misunderstood in a reductionist sense—'theology through the arts'.

A second approach might be termed 'music as possibility for revelation'. In this approach, music is not necessarily drawing on pre-existing theological or Scriptural claims, but rather music is understood to potentially mediate the divine and provide ways of encountering God. As part of the embodied human experience, music has the capacity, according to this view, to reveal something hidden or even inaccessible to the word. Situating their own approach directly in relation to what they perceive as the doctrine-centric approach of Begbie, David Brown and Gavin Hopps argue instead for the capacity of God to speak outwith the bounds of discursive Christian theology. Furthermore, they claim that the very abstract nature of music means it 'wanders beyond' linguistic and conceptual categories and is thus particularly suited to engendering religious experiences.[11] In their book *The Extravagance of Music*, Hopps and Brown explore a new possibility:

> [T]he possibility that spiritual realities can come to awareness in and through music in ways unavailable to verbal formulations, often in nominally secular contexts, and in modes that could sometimes require Christian theology to reconsider its primary terms, even its sense of possible ways of encountering God.[12]

According to Hopps, music can be 'disclosive' in that it can reflect or disclose something of the ineffable; it can also be 'affective' insofar as it may transfigure or transform the listener through communication with the divine.[13] This view of music's extravagance is underpinned by a belief in a generous and gracious—and extravagant—God who does not limit his capacity to have spoken once, in Scripture, but who speaks still through creation, through the incarnate, embodied Word made human, Jesus Christ, and through the creative and musical efforts of humanity as being *imago Dei*.

In *Music as Theology*, Maeve Louise Heaney strikes a related chord, claiming that since God communicates to human beings using all of our embodied faculties, 'there are things which God may *only* be saying through music'.[14] '[M]usic offers a form of approach to or comprehension of faith that is different to our linguistic and conceptual understanding of the same, and for that very reason is complementary to it, in theological discourse'.[15] Drawing on the doctrine of Christ's post-resurrection ascension into heaven as marking a new presence, rather than withdrawal, of Christ's body, Heaney argues that no longer restrained by time and space, the ascended Christ is now universally present to the world and mediates the presence of God via the Holy Spirit.[16] Considering the ascended body of Christ as a 'new form of presence

or availability of the glorified body of Christ to our life in the senses now', Heaney calls for a greater 'attentiveness to the embodied world of time and space as a *locus theologicus*'.[17] As music 'helps us inhabit the present moment in which we are living', it can, for Heaney, be such a *locus theologicus*, and therefore a means by which to understand and experience this presence.[18] Therefore, for Heaney, music not only illuminates doctrine but also is itself a means of God's revelation of Himself. Danielle Lynch similarly suggests that not only is music a 'temporally- and context-situated' means of 'doing' theology; it is also a means 'through which theological meaning can emerge'.[19] She contends that, due to music's embodied and temporal nature, music can afford an embodied encounter with God.

> Music is theology because of its sacramental potential, which is not limited [to] sacred music, or music with explicitly religious intent. There is not a particular form of sacred music which connects with God; rather, all music has sacramental potential. . . . As a sacramental form, music reveals something of the otherwise hidden God.[20]

Lynch draws on Schleiermacher's account that 'religion must take the whole of human experience into account' and cannot be limited to 'traditions, doctrines, and artefacts'.[21] Lynch proposes that 'music is a better way to communicate religious feeling than through words'; therefore music 'is a means by which those who have something to say which has a meaning beyond words can communicate that, thereby potentially mediating the presence of God to those that experience the music'.[22] Thus, for Lynch as for Heaney, music *is* theology, insofar as it has the capacity to mediate an encounter with the divine.

This book does not endeavour, then, to synthesise the contrasting approaches outlined above. Rather, I argue that different musical approaches—whether by virtue of the composer's individual faith, the musical setting or performing context, or the particular posture of the performer or listener—necessitate a multivalency in musical-theological approaches. Thus, the three case studies investigated seem to invite disparate approaches: applying the same methodology to each would diminish the possibility for broadened theological insight, and furthermore, could potentially lead to a theological misreading of a work entirely.

The book is divided into three parts of two chapters each. In the first chapter of each part, I consider James MacMillan, Arvo Pärt, and John Adams in turn, placing each composer in his respective musical context and drawing out a theological framework for their music. The second chapter in each part functions as a case study; here I give a close reading of a Passion setting by each composer, utilising theological frameworks considered earlier, and drawing out theological insights. There have been few, if any, published studies on these works, and little to no exploration of how the religious implications and musical styles of the composers interact with these works.

Therefore, this book attempts something different than another attempt at a 'theology of music'; instead, examining the religious impulses of each composer as far as they are known, I draw on the existing frameworks outlined above to demonstrate how musical theology emerges in the compositional practice of these individual composers.

Part I considers Scottish composer James MacMillan's recurring interest in the 'same three days of history'. In Chapter 1, I first set out his theology of music and composition, exploring the role faith plays in providing inspiration for his composition. I show how MacMillan's views on the search for the sacred inspire even his instrumental 'absolute' music. I then consider the importance of collaboration on MacMillan's composition, before developing how his musical theology leads him to a consistent concern, either explicitly or implicitly with Christ's Passion. Having thus set the stage, the latter part of this chapter examines his 2007 *St John Passion* to establish a methodological lens and counterfoil through which to read his more recent *St Luke Passion*. It is this 2012 *St Luke Passion* that provides the case study for Chapter 2. Developing further the role of collaboration in MacMillan's compositional process, I explain the specific influence of Begbie's DITA colloquium on the formation of this work. I then read the work considering four major components of MacMillan's theology and how they emerge in the *St Luke Passion*: the Marian emphasis via the Annunciation, the theological implications of silence, the theological meanings and connections derived via MacMillan's use of musical quotation, and the centrality of the infancy narrative are considered in turn. Freed from liturgical constraints, this concert work opens the narrative to the significance of the annunciation to Mary, and Christ's incarnation, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's death cannot be understood without these other events in the atonement 'arc', and MacMillan draws on his understanding of these doctrines to both practice his faith and to elucidate these doctrines musically.

In Part II, I turn to Estonian composer Arvo Pärt and his 1989 *Passio*. Chapter 3 considers Pärt's political and religious formation, his exile to Germany, and his search for a political and religious 'home'. I then interrogate both the positive and negative reception of his music, which is often termed 'spiritual' because of its accessibility and apparent simplicity, as well as its meditative qualities and affordance for contemplation. More substantively, I also address the role Pärt's music may take in contemplative prayer, as understood especially in the Orthodox tradition of iconography. I give an exposition of the Orthodox theology of the icon and argue that Pärt's music, as a theological act, can be understood constructively as an aural icon. Analysing the iconographic nature of Pärt's music and compositional methodology leads to a discussion of the *tintinnabuli* in Chapter 4. The *Passio*, the case study for this chapter, is considered to be the apotheosis of his *tintinnabuli* style, and so I include in this chapter an explanation of the layers of meaning in this style. I show how, for Pärt, *tintinnabuli* is a compositional style,

but more than this, it is a way of life, a religious practice. Having laid the iconographic foundation and delineated the musical *tintinnabuli* elements, I then turn to the close reading of the *Passio*. I describe the scoring and musical forces, explain the *tintinnabuli* 'key' and pitch structures, and then give a structural analysis which show several formulations of chiastic 'cross' structures. The theological implications that emerge show how the *Passio* is thus a visual icon of the cross, an aural icon of redemption, and an icon of the Word. Instead of merely illustrating Christian doctrine, I show in this chapter how Pärt's music can be revelatory, allowing listeners to encounter the divine, or perhaps even through faith be recipients of and participants in Christ's redemptive work. The icon present in the *Passio* presents a way of practicing and participating in heavenly worship.

After examining two distinctly Christian perspectives, I then turn to an agnostic perspective, and envisage how theological themes might emerge from a secular, post-modern composer. Thus, the third part of this book reflects on American composer John Adams. In Chapter 5, I argue that music can be spiritually transformative; for Adams, music is a space to explore theological uncertainty and doubt, and to raise difficult questions that have no clear answer. I first set the context for Adams as a composer, reviewing the scant scholarship and thus contributing to this nascent topic, and I examine his long and fruitful collaborative partnership with librettist and stage director Peter Sellars. I then turn to a consideration of his 2000 nativity oratorio, *El Niño*, which, as a companion piece to his later *Gospel According to the Other Mary*, provides a methodological framework and counterfoil for reading the later work. In Chapter 6, I provide a close reading of the Passion Oratorio *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*. In this study, I map some of the central thematic elements in this work, drawing out six theological themes. First, I consider the post-modern 'restaging' of the traditional formal structure of the Passion, showing how Adams depends on prior understanding of the Passion to destabilise and revitalise the listener's engagement. Second, I show how Adams reframes the Passion narrative, foreshadowing Christ's death and resurrection via the death and resurrection of Lazarus. Third, I show how Adams' approach to the Passion allows him to highlight the oft-overlooked feminine perspective. Telling the Passion story from Mary Magdalene's perspective, and interpolating poetry from women and minority culture poets, Adams is able to consider the Passion through the lens of the 'other', and he thus foregrounds otherwise overlooked or neglected voices. Fourth, I examine how Adams' omissions from traditional Passion settings allows Adams to elevate a familiar story into a universal call to action. Fifth, I discuss the post-modern telescoping of time, drawing the audience into realities that transcend time; suggesting Eucharistic inferences. Sixth, and finally, I demonstrate how Adams capitalises on the ambiguity between the sacred and the secular and show how music is therefore particularly well-suited to allow space for doubts, questioning, and seeking. Although perhaps arising

from a 'theologically insecure' genesis, I argue that this work has rich potential to engage with theology around the divinity of Jesus, and the meaning of his death and resurrection.

Each of these three approaches incline towards different musical theological approaches. MacMillan's starting point and *locus theologicus* is firmly within Catholic doctrine. I argue that Pärt's music, conversely, affords an iconic encounter with the divine. Further, for both of these composers, the act of composing is a theological *act*. Instead of the Western tradition that holds that theological discourse is primarily verbal and conceptual, MacMillan and Pärt treat their composition as theological action; therefore praxis, or 'doing theology', is considered as significant as discourse about theology. I argue, furthermore, that Adams' approach, whether intentional or not, allows for the possibility of God to reveal something of himself to one who is seeking. Such music thereby has the capability to be evangelistic: to prepare the hearts and minds of listeners, performers, and composers alike, to suggest sacrality, and to give space and opportunity for sacred experiences to form and shape belief.

Although the chapters that follow include some discussion of the Passion settings of MacMillan, Pärt, and Adams in relation to the Passion tradition as a whole, it is perhaps helpful to provide a brief overview of the genre here. I take my definition from von Fischer's seminal essay: '"Passion" is to be understood as the continuous musical setting of the biblical Passion narrative'.[23] In the history of the genre, deep appeal is made to the canon, with a typical assumption that Bach's Passions have a universal and central meaning, as the 'gold standard'. Passion music is widely assumed to have reached a pinnacle in Bach's masterworks, and it is these settings that are often appealed to in discussions of what is or is not 'traditional' in a Passion setting. Even Bach's own two extant settings, however, are situated within a long, historical evolution. The earliest known evidence of liturgical readings of the Passion comes from the late fourth century, in a detailed report by Etheria concerning her journey to Jerusalem and attendance at Christian services there. By mid-fifth century, Pope Leo the Great regulated the readings of the Passion as part of the Mass on various days: Matthew to be read on Palm Sunday and on Wednesday of Holy Week, and John on Good Friday. This was justified on the grounds that John was the only disciple who stood at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. Later, it became customary to substitute Luke for Matthew on Wednesday, and then by the tenth century to add Mark's rendering on Tuesday of Holy Week, although these are not uniformly observed, until the Roman Rite of the tenth century that stipulates the Passion Lesson to each of the four Gospels on their appointed days.[24]

The Passion reading was intoned or chanted by the deacon (as is typical for the Gospel Lesson) until at least the thirteenth century, when the text was distributed among three singers: one for the role of Christ, one for the role of the Evangelist (the narrator), and one singing all of the other character parts. Christ's words were usually sung on a low tone: the Evangelist in the middle register, and the remaining voices a higher tone. Adding polyphony to the

'turba', or 'crowd' scenes, as well as the addition of an *exordium* and *conclusio* to announce and conclude the Passion reading, were sixteenth-century developments. The so-called *summa Passionis* was made up of sections from all four Gospels; the earliest dating to early in the sixteenth century. Since the *summa Passionis* could not be used as the Gospel lesson in a mass, it indicates that already from the sixteenth-century extra-liturgical Passions were being composed.

From about 1650, independent instrumental parts began to be added, as well as the addition of related texts—other biblical texts, chorale texts, or Latin motets. An expressive paraphrased German libretto by Brockes in the early eighteenth century was set to music by Handel, Telemann, and others; this was in oratorio style and therefore also not suitable for the liturgy. By Bach's time, interpolated reflective texts were the norm, as well as madrigalian arias, and instrumental sinfonias. Passion settings were now delineated into several sub-genres. The extra-liturgical 'Passion Oratorio', which was loosely based on the Passion narrative, utilised original text, and was more operatic in nature; the 'Oratorio Passion' for liturgical use, which adhered to the biblical text although interpolated chorale text was added; the 'Responsorial Passion', which continued the old style of monophonic chant for the solo parts and polyphonic verse for the *turba*; and the Passion-adjacent 'lyrical meditations' on the Passion narrative that were newly composed reflections on the death of Christ rather than a re-telling of the story.

In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, Passion settings fell largely out of fashion, although occasionally Passion Oratorios were written specifically for the concert hall, such as Mendelssohn's *Christus*, Beethoven's *Christus am Ölberge*, and Stainer's *Crucifixion*. Jennifer Budziak marks Penderecki's 1965 *St Luke Passion* as the beginning of a revival of Passion settings.[25] According to Robert Ward, these Passions from the mid-twentieth century to the present typically use the biblical story and the musical traditions as a foundation from which to explore contemporary themes.[26] As Van Niekerk argues, the inclusion of interpolated reflective texts facilitates contextual retrospection and calls to action:

> It also provides an opportunity for the listener and performer to walk in the shoes of the 'Other'. It could be argued that the format of the Passion ideally makes the listener and the performer aware of different viewpoints in turn increasing their empathy and contextual understanding of the plight of other role players in life [*sic*]. The dramatic narrative of the Passion genre, seen in this light, seems particularly adept at expressing biting commentaries and socio-political ideologies directly addressing issues of suffering and social conscience.[27]

The contemporary Passion setting, a genre suffused with centuries of tradition, thereby finds itself an apt vehicle or musical space to consider familiar, universal themes of suffering, death, guilt, forgiveness, and redemption.

As in both art and theology, engagements with the atonement of Christ tend to focus on a particular moment: the crucifixion and death of Christ. Theological theories and models of the atonement ask questions about what was accomplished on the cross—how Christ's death effected salvation and reconciliation with God the Father.[28] Similarly, depicting Christ's Passion in art—and especially in traditional musical settings—is heavily weighted towards depicting and representing the crucified Christ.[29] Freed from the constraints of the liturgy, musical settings of the Passion enrich and enliven atonement theology, incorporating, as in the case of MacMillan's musical setting, the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ alongside the crucifixion as a more complete 'arc' of atonement. Especially in the last 50 years, the resurgence of the choral Passion, moreover, has led to an expansion of the genre's definition, allowing the spotlight to shift to otherwise overlooked themes. Discussing the resurgence of musical Passion settings, Budziak highlights the diversity these settings introduce into the repertoire.[30] Such settings may incorporate the use of original, para-Biblical texts, or expand the traditional Passion narrative beyond the events of Holy Week. In these extra-liturgical works, composers either take audience familiarity with the narrative for granted, or dismiss the importance and predominance of the narrative in favour of highlighting other themes, for example, to acknowledge a more universal experience of suffering, death, and loss. The genre has expanded beyond the liturgical bounds to include political and social commentary and discussion of suffering as universally relevant and, as Budziak develops, also allows for destabilisation, forcing the listener to question the familiar and consider new perspectives.[31] Instead of suppressing the sacred, the rise of secularism has, in these ways, allowed for exploration of alternative models of transcendence, perhaps even more freely accommodating divine encounter. There seems to be a recognition that the themes of the Passion are not confined to the liturgical Triduum, but instead address powerfully the contemporary world, even in its apparent secularity. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the musical genre of the Passion setting provides a privileged window into the theological and musical convictions of MacMillan, Pärt, and Adams, and it provides for them a way to communicate and embody their deeply held beliefs or uncertainties through innovative, and startingly different, compositional languages.

Notes

1 Joel Heng Hartse, *Dancing About Architecture Is a Reasonable Thing to Do: Writing About Music, Meaning, and the Ineffable* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022), title.
2 Ralph W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 1263.
3 For some useful summaries of the field, see Maeve Louise Heaney, *Music as Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 202–253; Danielle Lynch, *God in Sound and Silence: Music as Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 1–51; Jeremy Begbie and Steven Guthrie, 'Introduction', in *Resonant Witness:*

Conversations Between Music and Theology, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Guthrie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 1–13. Although a contrasting study, Heidi Epstein situates her gendered musical theology within the field in *Melting the Venusberg* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2004), 11–30.

4 Frank Burch Brown, 'Foreword', in *Extravagance of Music,* ed. David Brown and Gavin Hopps (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), x.

5 Burch Brown, 'Foreword', xi. Burch Brown notes that such doctrines are 'divinely given, albeit accommodated to human capacities'. This opens an interesting subcategory here, in which music might be seen as a tool to clarify or even help to resolve theological disagreements by offering alternative interpretations or unique perspectives.

6 Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4, emphases his.

7 Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 6.

8 Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Press, 2007), 19.

9 Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 278. If this book is primarily concerned with how music might benefit theology, his earliest undertaking to define the field, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (London: T&T Clark, 1991), and the later *Resounding Truth* take a slightly different approach of investigating how theology might having bearing on the arts. Begbie's approach has developed in the more recent *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), in which he engages with some of his interlocutors, challenging that their appeals to transcendence can result in abrogating 'historically grounded particularities of biblical faith' (3). Here, he recognises the pervasiveness of language of 'transcendence' in recent literature and although he acknowledges that 'there is something worth exploring seriously here', he warns against the heterogeneity in interpretation and often ambiguous use of the term 'transcendence'.

10 For instance, although Heidi Epstein allows that Begbie is 'rightly critical of the standard suspicions attributed to music throughout history', she argues that his approach ultimately 'reduces music to a mere proof-text for biblical doctrine', and that such proof-texting 'indicates a basic failure to take music seriously as a cultural document' (Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, 86). Epstein's hermeneutic of suspicion results in an alternative reconstruction of a theological reading of music rather than a corrective to perceived imbalances; although her work opens other potential avenues for application, her project is too dissimilar to Begbie's to allow for extended consideration here.

11 David Brown and Gavin Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1. David Brown's extensive writings involve many discussions of the visual and performing arts as being 'sacramental' in the sense that they can convey something of the divine. His views on music are perhaps most clearly distilled in *Extravagance of Music* although he writes extensively about music in *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and *God and Mystery in Words: Experience Through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), conversely, discusses music in context of the liturgy and hymns as drama and poetry.

12 Burch Brown, 'Foreword', xi.

13 Hopps, *Extravagance of Music*, 18. Unlike a large part of work in the interdiscipline of theology and music this far, Hopps's contribution to the field goes beyond the fruitful investigations in the world of Western art music to consider less 'serious' modes of music-making—especially the contentious areas of 'kitsch' and sentimental music—as particularly able to afford 'extravagant disclosure' of the divine in surprising places (196).