



Listening Guide

Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten by Arvo Pärt

Description

Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten by Arvo Pärt is a hauntingly beautiful soundscape that pays homage to the composer's religious beliefs and the life of Benjamin Britten. The choral quality of this work, minor key, and bell tolls creates a dark murky weightiness like waves of sadness washing over the listener. The unrelenting darkness throughout this work is only brightened at the end of a final bell toll which hints at optimism as it floats above the orchestra.

Listening Guide

Composition Date: 1980

Key: a minor

Orchestration: violin, viola, cello, bass, bells

Duration: 5 minutes

Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten

Description	Time
Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten opens with silence followed by three tolls of a bell setting a somber and spiritual atmosphere for this piece. The bell continues to ring throughout the remainder of the piece.	2:36-2:58
The first violins enter playing a descending A natural minor scale. A note is added to each recitation of the scale until it encompasses two octaves.	2:57
The second violins enter playing a descending A minor scale, adding a new note with each recitation. The second violins play this scale twice as slow as the first violins.	2:59

The violas enter playing a descending A minor scale, adding a new note with each recitation. The violas play this scale twice as slow as the second violins.	3:02
The cellos enter playing a descending A minor scale, adding a new note with each recitation. The cellos play this scale twice as slow as the violas violins.	3:09
The double basses enter playing a descending A minor scale, adding a new note with each recitation. The double basses play this scale twice as slow as the cellos.	3:23
All instruments of the orchestra play a descending A minor scale. Each instrument is playing this scale at an increasingly slower rate.	3:23-6:11
The first violins finish playing the descending A minor scale ending on the third note of the scale and sustaining this note until the end of the piece.	6:11
The second violins finish playing the descending A minor scale ending on the first note of the scale and sustaining this note until the end of the piece.	6:42
The violas finish playing the descending A minor scale ending on the fifth note of the scale and sustaining this note until the end of the piece.	7:10
The bells last toll until the end of the piece.	
The cellos finish playing the descending A minor scale ending on the first note of the scale and sustaining this note until the end of the piece.	7:44



The double basses finish playing the descending A minor scale ending on the first note of the scale and sustaining this note until the end of the piece.

8:01

The final bell toll of the piece is masked by the string instruments holding the first, third, and fifth notes of an A minor scale. All string instruments suddenly stop leaving only the resonating bell sound.

8:13

Listening Guide prepared by Shawn Earle, RSO Manager of Education & Outreach