Musical Scores and the Eternal Present (2021) by Chiara Bertoglio

Brad Eden
Independent scholar and librarian, brad.l.eden@gmail.com

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The author states numerous times that this book is first and foremost a Christian book, whose primary aim is to elucidate a theological and historical understanding of music (and especially musical notation) as a way to understand the philosophical challenges of past, present, and future time from a perspective grounded in Christian theology. In this attempt, the author is largely successful, documenting numerous Christian and musical theorists, philosophers, composers, and theologians from ancient times to the present and their scholarship related to the relationships between music, time, Christian theology, and history. Part One of the book presents this scholarship to the reader from a musicological and theological perspective, indicating the author's own knowledge and effective summation of the various theories and opinions on these topics, presented as simply as possible to the reader along with the author's comments and opinions. Part Two of the book explores various analogies/examples of the author's thesis from Part One, primarily through a theological reading of the Book of Genesis as envisioned by Tolkien in his "Ainulindalë" from *The Silmarillion*, but also Dante's *Commedia*, the poetry of Angelo Berardi (ca. 1636-94), Milton, John Donne, and many others.

Interspersed before, in-between, and at the end of the book are various musical terms as opinion/summary points by the author, such as *Praeludium, Cadenza, Intermezzo, Quodlibet,* and *Encore*. The *Praeludium* serves as a prelude/introduction chapter to the book, the *Cadenza* and *Intermezzo* as summary/half-way points between Part One and Part Two, and the *Quodlibet* and *Encore* as conclusion/author autobiography pieces. Each of these musical "stopping points" allows the author to either prepare the reader for what is coming, summarize what has been presented, or both.

In the *Praeludium*, the author sets up her thesis of how music notation is a symbol of the "eternal present," that is, the condition outside time, that transcends time, but which nonetheless embraces its totality. Chapter 1 provides a brief summary of how Christian theologians and other philosophers have described the relationship between time and God as an "eternal present." Boethius, Augustine, and Aquinas and their philosophies are specifically mentioned. The history of visual representations of Time in spatial terms is also provided. Chapter 2 moves into a history of musical notation, and how issues such as synchronicity, succession, simultaneity, and duration evolved and adapted. Chapter 3 is where the author argues that the structure of music, as experienced by the musician/listener and represented by the musical score, becomes meaningful and intelligible. Various examples of musical notation by various modern composers are mentioned to

support the author's hypothesis. Chapter 4 discusses the depiction of musical scores in the visual arts throughout history, and the author describes this symbolism as attempts to visualize temporality, fixation, eternity, and simultaneity.

Between Parts One and Two stand the *Cadenza* and *Intermezzo*. The Cadenza provides a short summary of the points presented in Part One, while the *Intermezzo* sets up the various analogies and examples of the "eternal present" in literature and theology, using Tolkien's opening section of the "Ainulindalë" and Dante Alighieri's *Commedia* as her cornerstone examples. It is important here to understand that polyphonic music or polyphony (that is, music having more two or more participants in its performance, as well as both vertical and horizontal spatiality in its notational presentation, i.e. musical score) is how both Christian theologians and musical composers throughout history have described the complex relationships between God, humans, and time; specifically, the contemplation of God as an analogy of a "musical score" is well documented and presented by the author.

As such, the collective improvisation by the Ainur in the "Ainulindalë," based on themes provided by Iluvatar/God, is a literal rereading of the Book of Genesis by Tolkien. Chapter 5 provides the detailed analysis of the creation of Arda and how Tolkien's presentation, participation, and interaction between Iluvatar and his "angels" is a perfect example of various theological concepts such as time, free will, and God's relationship with his creation from the Christian perspective. The author supports her discussion through the writings of Jacques de Liege (ca. 1260-ca. 1330) and Giovan Battista Marino (1569-1625), both medieval music theorists. Chapter 6 continues with a focus on how polyphonic improvisation embodies in Western thought and theology the utopia of free, creative, yet coordinated creation and contemplation by and of God. Dante's *Commedia* is discussed, along with the musical differences between cantus firmus and polyphony (for those without a musical background), and descriptions of polyphonic improvisational models as analogies in Christian theology and musical theory are provided. Seven summary theological points on limits, limitations, and freedom in relation to God, music, and creation are provided by the author as leads into Chapter 7, which I found to be the most interesting and important section of this book. In this chapter the author analyzes the differences between discord and dissonance, both musical terms with theological implications. In polyphony, dissonance is an important principle of musical harmonic composition, a required component to propel and guide the listener through various stages of musical chaos and resolution. Discord, on the other hand, is the purposeful attempt to upset and control situations where participation has parameters and rules. From the author's perspective, Tolkien's use of the word "discord" instead of "dissonance" was purposeful, as Melkor's transformation of Iluvatar's themes from polyphony into accompanied monody, and where Melkor's disciples become accompanists instead of polyphonists, are

graphic examples of the theological principle of free will gone wrong. Numerous theologians and writers are quoted to illustrate this point, including Honorius of Arles (ca. 1080-1154), John Donne (1572-1631), Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803), Fr. Peter Singer (1810-1882), Dante's Cacciaguida from his *Paradiso*, St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (ca. 1220-1274), Jacopone da Todi (ca. 1230-1306), St. Augustine, John Scotus Eriugena (ca. 815-ca. 877), Peter Abelard (1079-1142), Gioseffo Zarlino (1517-1590), Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716). Chapter 8, then, culminates all of the author's discussion and scholarship by illustrating how making music represents an almost theological undertaking, an imitation by humankind of God's Music. Human creativity is part of and emanates from God's creativity outside Time. Tolkien's "On Fairy-stories' and the poem "Mythopoeia" are quoted, along with the writings of Angelo Barardi (ca. 1636-1694), John Milton (1608-1674), Samuel T. Coleridge (1772-1834), Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), and the "singing time" (the time of religion and music) of philosopher Arild Pedersen (b. 1946). To encapsulate the author's thesis in one statement: "By choosing musical symbolism, rooted in a long literary and philosophical tradition of the Western thought, Tolkien is able to convey in the space of three or four pages an enormous depth of poetry and theology. Music, as the art of time, and as the art which demonstrates how dissonances can (and must) be part of harmony, is the perfect symbol for the redemption of the world, nourishing, as it does, our hope for the Great Music to come" (p. 163).

The *Quodlibet* is the author's philosophical summary of the many topics discussed throughout the book as a Christian statement of Christ's life as the great "song" of the History of Salvation, while the *Encore* is a personal statement by the author of various influences, feelings, and the importance of her Christian faith in the writing of this book.

Being a medieval musicologist, theologian, and Tolkien scholar with a similar education and background as this author, I appreciate the detail and care taken to support the scholarship and the presented thesis of the book with both musical and theological documentation. Tolkien research on this topic (his perspectives, background, and knowledge of music and musical language in his fantasy writings) has surged in the last twenty years, as indicated by the recent publications of Brad Eden, Heidi Steimel and Friedhelm Schneidewind, and Julian Eilmann and Friedhelm Schneidewind. That said, this book is not about Tolkien but about how music (and music notation in particular) represents aspects of the "eternal present" of God in and through time; Tolkien's "Ainulindalë" is presented as a theological/musicological example to support the author's argument/thesis on this topic. This research is very similar to the writings of Stratford Caldecott (1953-2014), a well-known Tolkien scholar whose excellent scholarship centered around

Tolkien's faith and Catholicism in a way that I would label as "faith-based." This doesn't make the scholarship any less relevant or important; it just means that a different perspective and thesis underlies the scholarship which the reader needs to identify and acknowledge as they digest and assimilate the presented arguments.

That said, the focus of the author's research and integration of current Tolkien scholarship on his uses of musical allusion in his works is somewhat lacking. The publication of *A Secret Vice: Tolkien on Invented Languages* in 2016 confirmed for many scholars how Tolkien thought about words, music, and language and their interrelationships in the early- to mid-twentieth century. The idea of "sound-words" and "word-music" in Tolkien's recently-published works by his son Christopher also supports the thesis that Tolkien saw himself as a "word-minstrel" and even a "minstrel-scholar." The concept of sub-creation was not invented by Tolkien, and its description by writers and philosophers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries has been documented by an essay in the 2019 *Sub-Creating Arda: World-Building in J.R.R. Tolkien's Work, its Precursors, and its Legacies*. Verlyn Flieger's scholarship in this area is given cursory attention and could have been more substantial. None of this current scholarship appears in the bibliography or is mentioned by the author in her arguments.

For non-music readers, the author's thesis about musical notation and its graphic representation of "time in music" is often mentioned, and some compositional examples are noted but not shown. It is difficult for the non-music reader to understand graphical representation without being able to view a specific example, so I would like to provide one which I have used when teaching music appreciation classes and is one of the better-known graphical representations of an event in time through music. This is Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1961), which graphically represents in music performance and musical notation objects and sounds such as jets, jet engines and their trails in the sky, the dropping of bombs, and specifically the dropping of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima during World War II. A reliable performance with animated musical score is available on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HilGth RhwP8). Being able to view something like this might help non-music readers better understand the author's overall thesis and arguments.

Bradford Lee Eden
Drexel University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania