

FOREWORD

Over the last decades, research into the works of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis has repeatedly brought together musicians, musicologists, historians, philosophers and anthropologists in Lithuania and abroad. This collection of scientific papers continues and deepens the ideas developed at the international conference *Sonatic Soundscapes of M. K. Čiurlionis*, held in Druskininkai in 2021. The collection's authors connected different epochs, brought together distant generations of creators, and opened wide horizons of cultural transformations. The first part of the series of seven conferences joined speakers from the Far East and various Western countries. The participants, inspired by the imaginative impulses of the great Čiurlionis, were focused on his most mature creative period. By addressing important questions, speakers from different countries not only became culturally closer, but also by looking, listening, and emphatically living through Čiurlionis' work, they generously shared their insights, enriching each other and the growing world of Čiurlionis' works studies.

The conference once again proved that Čiurlionis' works have exceptional significance in Lithuania and have an endless potential to unite creators working in various fields of the humanities to study the most relevant problems of contemporary Čiurlionis' works studies. We can say that Čiurlionis' cultural vision comes to life in a certain sense in the projects of our days – as he once wrote from Leipzig: “I imagine the whole world as one big symphony...” The various forms of spreading Čiurlionis' work stimulate and encourage impulses of his brilliant scientific and cultural imagination, and integrate the different forms of his creativity into Lithuanian and world culture. Articles in this collection not only deepen the study of Čiurlionis' work, but also contribute to an essential contextualization of Lithuanian heritage, and an appreciation of its significance in the broader global cultural treasury. Thus, the systematic and focused research on Čiurlionis' art, music, and literary-poetic works at the international conferences in Druskininkai, which is focused on the most actual issues, is also a form of cultural dissemination showing the artist's place alongside other outstanding artists of the world.

In this collection, texts written not only in different scholarly journals, but also in different languages, speak alongside each other. The collection consists of four chapters. The first, entitled “Esoteric Aspects of Čiurlionis’ Work”, opens with an article by Antanas Andrijauskas on the links between Čiurlionis’ work and that of his teacher Kazimieras Stabrauskas, and the Theosophical movement. The author shows that Čiurlionis’ works are inseparable from the theosophical ideas that shaped the cultural landscape of the time. In his early work, Čiurlionis was still searching for a means of artistic expression. Unlike his teacher Stabrauskas, Čiurlionis did not belong to any esoteric society. Still, like many artists associated with the traditions of Symbolism and the nascent art of Modernism, esoteric tendencies profoundly influenced Čiurlionis’ painting style. They shaped his unique view of the diversity of world cultural history, the archaic layers of Lithuanian folklore, and mythology. That also inspired him to create a musical painting style with no analogs in world art. In contrast, in his later, more mature sonata and metaphysical work, his creative expression took on subtle forms of esoteric symbolism and rich metaphors.

The analysis of questions of esoteric influences is continued by Dalia Micevičiūtė’s article “Horizontal and Vertical Relations in Čiurlionis’ Painterly Expression. Parallels of Esotericism in the Čiurlionian Paradigm”. Dalia draws attention to the regularities of Čiurlionis’ musical and pictorial expression, and the compositional structuring of the artistic material, particularly relevant in the mature painting of the *Sonata* period. Dalia notes that the correlations between musical and visual expression are particularly evident in the interactions between horizontals and verticals. She also seems to be extending Antanas Andrijauskas’ insight that Čiurlionis’ deepest creative impulses can be traced back to theosophy and other manifestations of modern esotericism prevalent at the beginning of the 20th century. The author concludes that each of Čiurlionis’ paintings is an enigmatic multifaceted work, revealing not only the principles of the interaction of verticals and horizontals, but also many overlapping layers of symbolism dictated by artistic polysemy. Such paintings could be described as a totality of layers of meaning, like a gateway to the world of hidden metaphors and allegories imbued with theosophical and other esoteric ideas.

Laura Ivanova's article "Seeing Čiurlionis Through the Eyes of Uždavinis: The Mystery of the Dispersion of Light as a Theurgical Act" links two creators who grew up in Dzūkija. Laura explores a deep inner bond of creative attitudes, which is manifested in the constant search for higher spiritual ideals and value systems. The juxtaposition of the mystical genius of Čiurlionis and the genius of Algis Uždavinis in Laura's article reveals the amazing cosmogony of Čiurlionis' symbols and the theurgical parallels of Uždavinis', which mark a specific kinship between the landmarks of their spiritual journey. Uždavinis links the true goal of philosophy to igniting the spark in man and elevating the soul to the divine realm. The path of theurgic ascent, which the genius of Uždavinis explored in his work can, according to the author, be a glimpse into the *Sonata* works of Čiurlionis. In one of his interviews, Uždavinis insightfully says that the modern artist has lost his place he had in antiquity and the mythical world; he has lost his vocation to represent and give voice to the spiritual world developed by religious canons and mythic traditions. The modern artist is, as it were, in a spiritual desert. However, Čiurlionis restores the very spiritual foundations in the contemporary desacralized world. He reconstructs the meaningful universe of spiritual symbols, revives the structures of spiritual values, and enlightens man. Thus, according to Laura, Čiurlionis is undoubtedly following the path of a philosopher, understanding philosophy as the knowledge of being and the discovery of man's true self.

The articles in the second chapter immerse us in the experiences of the world that Čiurlionis creates. Here we are invited to think, see and listen in Čiurlionis' way. Meditation, concentration, rhyming, feeling empathy and spiritual penetration – subtle aesthetic units – assist the researcher in looking at Čiurlionis' genius. This approach creates a particularly nuanced Čiurlionis aesthetic. The second chapter, entitled "The World of Čiurlionis", opens with an article by Jonas Čiurlionis entitled "The World of Čiurlionis: Seeing Through the Eyes of the Soul". It shows that the Lithuanian artist's work is best understood by looking into the depths of his inner world. As Jonas writes, the artist's worldview, his way of life, his ethical and aesthetic views, and his religious and philosophical attitudes best explain his work. To reveal the genius of Čiurlionis' personality, the author shows that eternal spiritual ordinary human

values best describe the artist's worldview based on the fundamental principles of transcendent harmony. Čiurlionis and his work, according to Jonas, do not lend themselves to being boxed in by the everyday world. It is worth abandoning comparisons here, and revealing the uniqueness of the Lithuanian genius, his closeness to Renaissance universalism, which transcends any historical context. The work of genius connects time and space, showing the eternity that lies beyond them. Music and painting, sound and color merge here. Sound becomes expressed in time – music – and color in space – painting. The genius of Čiurlionis expresses music through painting and painting through music – time through space and space through time.

The interaction of time and space in Čiurlionis' work is also interestingly developed by Jūratė Landsbergytė Becher. In her article "Čiurlionis' *Andante*: Vision through Music", Jūratė vividly shows that in the *Spring Sonata*, time and space unfold in rhythm and movement. Čiurlionis' work, according to Jūratė, encodes music's becoming a vision of the process. The process here is, first of all, evident in *Andante*. In the slow movements of the sonatas, where time seems to be suspended or slowed down, there is a step that emphasizes the rhythmic nature of spatial depths. This step is the essence of the architecture of the world's mysteries. It resounds in the images of the paintings, which here seem to transcend their limits. The sound is associated with the depth of space, so the step acquires the power of transcendental propulsion. *Andante* gives impetus to the transformation of musical forms. In Čiurlionis' work, musical concepts are not only transformed into paintings. These paintings are also unique in the sense of changes and sustainability of forms. Thus, we can say that in Čiurlionis' work, we can already see the preconditions for the expression of cinematography, which is caused by the pull of movement steps.

Stasys Mostauskis, in his article "Repeating Horizons and Imagined Springs", takes on a difficult task. Čiurlionis' work is disclosed here via ontologising aesthetics. Stasys argues that the world seen by the eye is always shallower than the reality experienced. Naturally, the dimensions of appearance and experience inevitably diverge. Stasys explains that artists can remedy this discrepancy by transforming and linking different dimensions in invisible aesthetic relationships distinctively and subtly. We can say that the artist's

uniqueness and individuality determine the subjectivity of expression. The eloquence and immediacy of this subjectivity go far beyond the visible world. Stasys sums up by saying that it is not the reality revealed to the eye that is the criterion of the truth of the image presented in a work of art. Instead, conversely, the very work of art is an instrument of persuasion of the visible world. In other words, the work of art is seen here in a Schopenhauerian way as an instrument that facilitates cognition. The reality of the artistic image is not only separated from the visible world, but ascribed a higher ontological certainty since experiences, we might say, are more meaningful and authentic than the visible forms themselves. Thus, it is as if the ontological lining of reality is removed in artistic images. Like a modern-day oracle, the artist can show the invisible by representing it in visible aesthetic forms. It is as if the artist is parting the veil of the unknown, opening a window into the hidden reality of the covering, supplementing the visual world with imagined forms of the invisible. As Stasys writes, looking at Čiurlionis' works, we come across a unique spatiality formed by abandoning the traditional notion of the horizon, which when removed in Čiurlionis' compositions, produces various effects that destabilize the traditional spatial image. Not only does the space depicted become limitless, as the frames that bind it no longer exist, but also the human world loses the supports that ensure stability. The world turns into a kind of spatial compaction or a floating island, obeying the currents of that space. This movement is not limited to the earthly dimension – together with Čiurlionis, who develops visions of the cosmic system, we seem to be looking at reality through the eyes of cosmic consciousness.

Martynas Švėgžda von Bekker, in his article “The Čiurlionis Code – An Immediate Tale of the Lithuanian World”, reminds us that Čiurlionis is the child and descendant of ancient Baltic myths. Martynas writes that Čiurlionis opens his worldview with visible and audible images of the conscious and subconscious, symbols, signs, colors, consonants, shapes, compositions, and their architectonics, poeticism, and rhythm. Čiurlionis, according to Martynas, incorporates into his creative forms not only polyphony, counterpoint, sonata forms, themes, sub-poems, and canons, but in using all of this, he remains faithful to the wonders inherited from his ancestors that were revealed to

him. In Čiurlionis' work, we can still see the infinite inner desire of the old Lithuanian to penetrate deeper and deeper into the impenetrable Forest, the invincible Sea, the unreachable Heaven, the immense Earth, the Mother Sun, and the Stars.

The third chapter, "Čiurlionis and East Asian Aesthetics", opens with texts by Dr. Sun Min and Dr. Zhang Bin of Nanjing University. Sun Min and Zhang Bin juxtapose Čiurlionis' work with East Asian visual aesthetics. They astutely observe that Čiurlionis' work depicts a world that, according to a well-known Buddhist saying (不生不灭 *bu sheng bu mie*), exists before birth and extinction. Sun Min and Zhang Bin in Čiurlionis' work highlight the element of 氣 *qi* energy developed in Chinese and Japanese aesthetics. Paintings are about the energy that opens up the worlds depicted and brings them to life. *Qi* energy here seems to flow, connecting the creator and the viewer, activating the empathic dimension of empathy. The tradition of the concept of *qi* allows us to talk about the viewer's transference to aesthetic dimensions. The flow of *qi* energy, which is not specific to a particular time and place and can be expressed in works of art, becomes a way of opening up different times and spaces and linking other traditions, cultures and civilizations. Thus, the artworks here are a gateway to a universal dimension, visible to those who feel the flow of *qi* energy. Sun Min and Zhang Bin emphasize the multi-layered nature of the *Spring Sonata* and show that it depicts the four fundamental elements – earth, wind, water and fire. The cycle's paintings seem to express the characteristic features of these elements naturally: Earth in the *Allegro*; Wind in the *Andante*; Water in the *Scherzo*; Fire in the *Finale*. According to the article's authors, the most important thing is that in all the paintings of the cycle, there is a strong sense of the flow of vital energy.

Julius Vaitkevičius continues the insights of his colleagues from the same university. He discusses not only the question of *qi*, but also develops the concept of the spiritual path of the Dao of Čiurlionis in his text "The Inexpressible Dao-Way of Čiurlionis: Reflections of Distant Worlds in the Sonata Paintings". Čiurlionis' work, he believes, contributes to a deeper understanding of the concepts of *qi* and Dao, which are inseparable from Chinese aesthetics, and the latter, in turn, deepens and broadens the understanding of Čiurlionis'

work. The inexhaustibility of concepts and the allusion to ineffable dimensions simultaneously open the energy inherent in Čiurlionis' work when an image awakens the viewer's self to a vital movement, freeing the consciousness from the limitations of the world of "slumbering" things. Thus, the concepts of qi and Dao in Julius' presentation allow us to talk about Čiurlionis' work in a completely new way, using concepts that have not yet been developed in Western aesthetics.

Similarly, Žilvinas Svigaris, in his article "Meditative Soundscapes of Čiurlionis' Sonata Works", discusses the painting techniques and styles used in Čiurlionis' *Spring Sonata*, which resonate with the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of the Zen tradition developed in China and Japan. The author shows that Čiurlionis' universalism and holistic tendencies allow us to look at his works with ordinary human empathy and experience them. Here, he is not referring to the surface of the paintings, but rather empathetically feeling them revealing the nuances of reality that various spiritual traditions have developed over centuries. Čiurlionis painted not a real world, but a world saturated with meaningful forms of cultural imagination in the style typical of the masters of landscape painting in the East Asian artistic tradition. Here, as in East Asian landscapes, the inner reality and states of creative fullness are depicted, and it is in these states that the viewer meets the artist.

The third chapter concludes with Yumiko Nunokawa's article "Influence of Japonisme, and musical elements in the series of paintings *Sonata of the Spring* by M. K. Čiurlionis". Yumiko presents several iconic Japanese artworks of "ukiyo-e" and demonstrates the undeniable influence of Japonisme on Western artists and, thus, on Čiurlionis' work. Comparing Čiurlionis' work with that of the American-born James Abbott McNeill Whistler, and English-born artist Yumiko Nunokawa shows that both artists share a strong influence of Japonisme, but also a significant interaction between fine art and music. However, the author summarizes her research and argues that the musical dimension expressed in Čiurlionis' work far surpasses that of Whistler. The works mentioned by Yumiko were exhibited in Kriwult's salon between 1900 and 1901, and later in Feliks Jasieński's collection of Japanese art in Warsaw, which Čiurlionis probably had also seen.

The fourth chapter, entitled “Čiurlionis’ Sonata Soundscapes”, opens with Algis Mickūnas’ article “Upsurgence”, which deals with the musical phenomenology of depth, revealing not the surface of things, but the profound essence of phenomena. According to the article’s author, Čiurlionis’ works show a reality that shapes thinking more significantly than the concrete attributes of material objects. Here, an aesthetic phenomenality is experienced, which can be regarded as a dimension in which all events take their forms. The silent dimension also opens the quiet depth, where events occur without chronological signs. This transformation of chronology is sometimes also identified with a never-completed identity. It transforms materiality and substantiality into the structure of a flowing stream of events. Čiurlionis depicts an undulating dynamic reality, a present that cannot be logically broken down; it is not experienced objectively or subjectively, but as a flow. The aesthetic uniqueness of this artist, his originality, draws one into participation in an aesthetic passion that is self-justified. Here, creation is self-creation, and passion is passionate for oneself, not some subjective passion, but a global passion. In Čiurlionis’ works, the passion for the undulating sea and the forests is not some isolated trait, but a depth that permeates the whole cosmos. Therefore, Čiurlionis’ aesthetics is the revelation of a cosmos constantly creating itself, and the viewer’s participation in this self-creation, continues the self-creation of the universe.

Alphonso Lingis, in his article “Sovereignty and Subjection in the *Spring Sonata*“, shows that Čiurlionis does not represent objects or even material reality. “He relates the paintings of the *Spring Sonata* cycle to the primary elements that many ancient mythical traditions have considered to be the foundations of the world: the first to the earth, the second to space, or air, the third to water and the fourth to the heavens. As in Japanese or Chinese paintings, the observer is not located at a single point. It is as if the paintings were painted with him at different observation points.” In the *Spring Sonata*, as in other works, the observer is as if in three dimensions so that things overlap, reflect each other, and simultaneously point to what is beyond our perception. It is disturbing that the landscape in which man lives is the land of death. In *Andante*, for example, the earthly mills are at a standstill, and the land around them is barren, their crosses sticking out like symbols of crucifixion. But the landscape is also

seductive. The paintings emphasize the shape or color of things – when we look, we experience profound experiences, light, water and the materiality of earth or stone. The fascinating thing, according to the author, is that real things project their shadows and reflections in the water, mirages in the air. Yet, they are both similar and different simultaneously, echoing things.

Yana Zhemoytel's article "The Concept of Time in *Spring Sonata* by Čiurlionis" highlights the literary aspect and the importance of time in the *Spring Sonata*. The author writes that the *Spring Sonata* is like a lyrical monologue by the artist, in which inspiration overwhelms the transformations of rebirth. Here everything comes to life – trees, birds, fish. People obey the mad rhythm of spring. Čiurlionis' *Spring Sonata* begins as a dramatic clash between two fundamental principles. Usually, spring noisily overcomes the cold and melts the ice. Still, according to the article's author, it is surprisingly calm, following the *Andante* at a slower pace until it freezes completely. And, strangely, the *Scherzo* takes place in an underwater world, while the *Finale* returns us to the cosmic realm. High up in the sky, multi-colored flags suddenly flutter in the wind. The overall light and the joyful feeling are more in keeping with the naughty *Scherzo*. But where and when does spring appear, the author asks. Spring ripens in space and from there descends to earth. Spring is the eternal wind that bends the trees and turns the mill's blades. It is the ongoing work of turning the world upside down and grinding human troubles into flour. The flour will snow next winter, *Allegro* will melt again next spring. According to the author, the paintings of the *Spring Sonata* symbolize the mythical cyclical time, which returning to itself, renews and returns to the divine source.

The fourth chapter concludes with Nida Gaidauskienė's article "The *Spring Sonata*: a Tangle of Musical and Cultural Imagination", in which the author writes that the thematic titles of the *Sonata* cycles were not chosen immediately, but were initially numbered. The same happened with Čiurlionis' *Spring Sonata*, painted in Druskininkai. This sonatic cycle immerses us into a landscape reminiscent of childhood experiences. Nida reflects on the concept of spring, which was developed in various ways in the broad cultural context of the time, and stood for rebirth and cultural rejuvenation. Nida interestingly describes several similarities between the works of Donelaitis and Čiurlionis, how their

titles came about, and other significant and exciting cultural parallels between these two great Lithuanian artists. The second part of Nida's article discusses Čiurlionis' efforts to visualize musical thinking, emphasizing his paintings' musicality and polyphonic multi-layered nature. These creative registers create a unique sense of the passage of time, and link to the fundamental questions of being and the universe's structure.

These multidimensional investigations of the essential questions raised by Čiurlionis' work, which were born in Druskininkai, have already inspired new insights into the dissemination and deepening of Lithuanian culture. They are continued in the following events of this conference cycle. The second conference in 2022, dedicated to the *Snake Sonata*, has been already held. The third conference for 2023 is currently being organized for the *Summer Sonata*. These conferences are like the fulfillment of Čiurlionis' creative vision because they allow the participant to enter the world of multiple dialogues creatively, together with Čiurlionis' endless inspiration, warm friendliness, infinite openness and fidelity to the Lithuanian spirit.

Žilvinas Svigaris
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