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GAIDA, BALTIC FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

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A report on "Gaida," the Baltic Festival of Contemporary Music held at Vilnius, Lithuania, from 24 to 30 October 1991.

"GAIDA" is a Lithuanian word which means a note in music, either written or heard, a melody, or even a mode. It is thus multiple in significance and open in connotation, and is, more importantly, the name given the festival of contemporary music held at Vilnius, Lithuania, between the 24th and 30th of October 1991. Although not the first such festival, this was the first time the festival included works by Polish, Swedish, Estonian, and Latvian composers and involved musicologists and journalists from many parts of the world. Clearly this festival represented a broadening of scope at a time when Lithuania has come to world attention because of its newly-established independence. I was the only American to attend the conference and was invited by the Lithuanian Cultural Committee of the United States to observe the festival and make reports of its activities. In addition, I was charged with the task of establishing connections between Lithuanian and American composers and of helping Lithuanian composers become better known in the West.

To understand the importance of the festival, it is necessary to have some sense of Lithuanian musical history. Because Lithuania was long under Russian domination, it did not develop an independent musical life until this century. Undoubtedly the most important figure in the establishment of modern music in Lithuania was Mikalojus Čiurlionis (1875-1911). Čiurlionis was an extremely gifted composer, painter, and writer—well-known to every educated Lithuanian, but almost completely unknown in the West. His most interesting compositions are a series of piano preludes, which from about 1908 increasingly explore chromaticism and atonality. Influenced by Scriabin, Reger, and Liszt, these works constitute the beginnings of modern music in Lithuania. Later such composers as Jeronimas Kačinskis (1917-) and Vytautas Bacevičius (1905-70) introduced serialism and other modern devices into Lithuanian music, largely because of their western education. Despite Russian domination and the many economic problems Lithuania has suffered in recent decades, it has been able to educate many gifted composers. The chief purpose of the GAIDA Festival was to showcase these composers and demonstrate to the world the level of musical sophistication Lithuania has achieved.

The festival featured orchestral, chamber, and solo concerts of various sorts. Although the major portion was made up of Lithuanian music, compositions by interesting Latvian, Polish, Estonian, Hungarian, and Swedish composers were also heard. The compositions and their styles covered the spectrum of the contemporary from modified minimalism to electronic enhancement, texturalism, and post-Webern pointillism. In general, the level of performance was high and many fine compositions were featured. The concerts were presented in three elegant halls and the cathedral, and every resource available was employed to create a good impression.

The festival was organized and directed by the Lithuanian Composers' Union, whose director is an energetic composer by the name of Mindaugas Urbaitis (1937-). The festival opened and closed with large orchestral concerts held in the imposing Opera and Ballet Theatre. The major work of the first concert was Lutoslawski's Symphony No. 3, originally written for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. A charming prelude to this event was a concert of songs and chamber music held at Druskininkai, the beautiful and mysterious birthplace of Čiurlionis.

Naturally during a festival of such dimensions one hears many works—some of which are excellent, some of less importance. However, certain composers are held by universal opinion to be outstanding. For example, Osvaldas Balakauskas (1937-) is the chairman of composition at the Lithuanian Music Academy and has written symphonies, concerti, and much chamber music. His powerful "Rain for Krakow" (1991) for piano and violin made a tremendous impression on a recital given by Raimondas Katilius, Lithuania's leading violinist.

Of the younger generation, Urbaitis, mentioned previously, was represented on the festival by several strong works, particularly the "Love Song and Parting" for soprano and digital delay system (1979). There was clearly an effort to represent younger as well as established composers. Although not every effort was a success, I was much struck by the level of sophistication and technique even of the younger composers.

Of the great number of works I heard, the following most caught my attention. I heard in the grand baroque cathedral a relatively early mass by Kačinskas entitled *Missa In Honorem Immaculati Cordis Beatae Mariae Virginis* (1951). Kačinskas was, as mentioned previously, one of the first composers to employ serialism. This mass, performed by a wonderful blind choir, seemed deeply moving and appropriate to the present time when Roman Catholicism is again allowed free expression. A concert given by the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, one of their best ensembles, featured Urbaitis' "Lithuanian Folk Music" (1990) and Onutė Narbutaitė's "Opus Lugubre" for strings — both successful. One of the high points of the festival was a performance by the Vilnius String Quartet, a group that can rival any string quartet specializing in contemporary music. Outstanding works in this concert were Petras Vask's String Quartet No. 2 (1984) and B. Kutavičius's Second String Quartet *Anno cum tettigonia* (1980), the latter an incredibly expressive exercise in minimalism and electronic enhancement. The concluding concert of the festival was again for orchestra and finished off with Jurgis Juozapaitis's *Rex Sym-phony* (1975). This is inspired by one of Čiurlionis's paintings and has historical importance for Lithuanian composers in that it was one of the first large-scale orchestral pieces to include recent innovative instrumental techniques.

No dominating aesthetic was to be found, though texturalism and minimalism related to the inherent minimalism of Lithuanian folksongs were common. There was less Webern-like pointillism and only a few works used the dry electronic devices stylish in the West a few decades ago. The clear influence of the Polish School could be detected, but an individual and expressive quality was also much in evidence.

A parallel event to the festival was a musicological conference on the topic of post-modernism in which Lithuanian and Polish musicologists participated. A number of interesting papers were read, including one on Penderecki's recent opera *Ubu Roi*. Although Lithuanian musicology has only in the last three years been recognized as a formal discipline by the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture, there is evidence of the beginnings of energetic scholarly activity. It seems that analytic and culturally oriented articles of high quality are being written, although work is hampered by a lack of contact with the West, the unavailability of appropriate texts in Lithuanian, and by the dearth of resources of printing, etc. During my stay, however, I met with some of the leading musicologists, who universally expressed interest in establishing contact with their American counterparts.

Unfortunately, Lithuanian composers and scholars are be-set by a number of problems which keep them from attracting world attention. First, although Lithuanian music was previously published in Russia, principally in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), this is no longer possible. When Lithuania attained freedom from the Soviet Union, the Kremlin terminated all previous economic benefits. In addition, the Soviets long kept Lithuanian composers and performers isolated from the outside world. This has meant a history of few resources and few western opportunities. If composers or performers were to be promoted, they tended to be those from Moscow or Leningrad rather than from Vilnius or Riga.

On the other hand, despite these restrictions, Lithuania has been able to maintain an independent and high level of musical culture. Several times during my stay, I posed the question of how have Lithuanian composers remained current in their styles, despite their isolation. It became clear that the major reason was their continuing connections with Poland and the Warsaw Autumn Festival, which they viewed as "their window to the West." Conversely, several influential Polish scholars and composers, most notably Penderecki, have had an interest in Lithuanian music. But with their new freedom, Lithuanians are interested in other windows, particularly in the United States.

In order to give the reader a more particular idea of the festival, I give the following summary of events:

- 2 Orchestral concerts at the beginning and end
- 1 Concert with string quartet
- 2 Concerts of music by student composers
- 1 Concert involving tapes and live performances
- 2 Concerts of piano music
- 2 Concerts featuring choral music
- 1 Concert of vocal repertory
- 1 Concert with chamber orchestra
- 3 Concerts involving various chamber groups

Thus 15 concerts were presented.

The following were the composers, musicologists, and journalists who were invited to observe the festival:

Martin Demmler, Berlin; Dorothee Eberlein, Cologne; Hannelore Gerlach, Berlin; Raminta Lampsaitis, Hamburg; Reinhard Oelschlaegel, Cologne; Elmer Schoenberg, Amsterdam; Leslie East, London; Paul Anthony Dirmeikis, Six-Fours, France; Jacques Di Vanni, Paris; Miklos Maros, Stockholm; Arne Mellnas, Stockholm; Folke Rabe, Stockholm; Martin Smolka, Prague; Enrique Alberto Arias, Chicago; Zbigniew Baginski, Warsaw; Andrzej Chtopicki, Warsaw; Regina

Chtopicka, Krakow; Krzysztof Droba, Krakow; Malgorzata Janicka-Stysz, Krakow; Aleksandr Lason, Warsaw; Teresa Malecka, Krakow; Elzbieta Szczepanska-Malinowska, Warsaw; Nina Aleksandrovna Gerasimova-Persidskaja, Kiev; Vladimir Ptrovich Guba, Kiev; Martins Boiko, Riga; Arvydas Bomiks, Riga; Maja Enfelde, Riga; Juris Karlsons, Riga; Inesa Lusinia-Čudare, Riga; Peteris Plakidis, Riga; Peteris Vasks, Riga; Priit Kuusk, Tallinn; Ester Magi, Tallinn; Alo Poldmae, Tallinn; Erkki-Sven Tuur, Tallinn.

The following contain further information on contemporary Lithuanian composers:

Danuser, Hermann. Hannelore Gerlach, Jurgen Kochel. *Musik im Licht der Perestroika*. Laaber Verlag, 1990.

Gerlach, Hannelore. *Funfzig sowjetische Komponisten der Gegenwart*. Edition Peters, 1984.

Lampsaitis, Raminta. *Silence, Interviews with Osvaldas Balakauskas*. Fischer Druck, 1988.

Di Vanni, Jacques. *Trente Ans de Musique Sovietique*. Actes Sud, 1987.

For further information on Lithuanian composers, contact: Composers Forum, Lithuanian Composers Union, Mickevičiaus 29, Vilnius 2600, Lithuania; telephone: 733061; 752811; telex: 261140 LITUS SU.