



Raimundas Katilius

KATILIUS IN AMERICA:

REMINISCENCES, REFLECTIONS, AND IMPACT

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The subject of the present article is Raimundas Katilius -Lithuania's most distinguished virtuoso. Katilius' violin concerts have won him an enviable reputation as a musical performer of world-class distinction. I will be discussing Raimundas Katilius' biography, accomplishments, and American tours, which began in 1992 and continued to as recently as 1997. Within the context of this discussion, I will include major repertory performed, recent recordings, and an overall perspective on the impact of these tours. I will also consider the ongoing relationships between American and Lithuanian musicians and composers caused by these tours, thus showing that Katilius has become more than a stunning virtuoso but also a musical ambassador. Thus this article will demonstrate important cultural connections between the United States and Lithuania resulting from these brilliant concerts.

Raimundas Katilius was born on March 16, 1947 in Vilnius Lithuania. In 1964 he graduated from the M. K. Čiurlionis School of the Arts, where he studied with A. Livontas, a principal violin pedagogue in Vilnius, who bequeathed his violin to Katilius. From 1965 to 1972 he studied at the P. Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, graduating with a Masters degree. Here his violin teacher was the famous pedagogue Professor Igor Bezrodny. In addition to the profound influence of these teachers, Katilius has been inspired by the virtuosity of Jascha Heifetz, who, as we will see later in the article, was also born in Vilnius. Katilius has made a specific study of Heifetz's technique and performing style and has used this as a basis for his own performance.

At the beginning of his professional career, Katilius won several major contests: Helsinki (1970), Montreal (1972), Belgrade (1971), and Bratislava (1972). Presently he is professor of violin at the Lithuanian Music Academy. In addition to his teaching, he gives over 200 concerts annually in important cities and with major orchestras throughout Europe. In 1986 he married, his wife Birutė and he have one daughter named Raimonda, who also is a violinist and with whom Katilius sometimes gives concerts. In 1998 he received the Order of Gediminas, Lithuania's highest honor.

Katilius is known for his intense virtuosity, his staggering technique which allows him to perform the most advanced modern repertory, and his utter devotion to his art. He often presents different repertory within the space of several days and sometimes, as occurred in America, gives two concerts a day. He is compulsive in practicing, even rehearsing during the intermissions of his concerts. Unlike many violinists of the first category, Katilius is constantly performing new music, often compositions that were specifically written for him. He also, as we shall see within this article, explores unknown masterpieces of the great composers, thus creating programs that demand as much of his audiences as of himself. In my personal experience, a Katilius performance is a dizzying experience in that limits are constantly tested and expanded. I believe this is a direct result of the influence of Heifetz, who was known for his flawless perfection. Katilius is one with his instrument and with the repertory he performs. He clearly does an intense study of this repertory, but this study does not cease once the score is learned, for Katilius is constantly revising and rethinking his interpretations to achieve the ultimate. It is because of these factors that audiences leave his concerts dazzled and inspired.

In Lithuania Katilius is a legend. Indeed one can speak of a "Katilius cult," resulting in the immediate sellout of his concerts. His two decades of teaching have produced many of the violinists of Lithuania's two major orchestras. His recommendation is thus an immediate entree into the professional world. He is furthermore in close contact with Lithuania's leading modern composers. Such composers as O. Balakauskas, B. Kutavičius, F. Bajoras, and E. Balsys have written works for him,

which he has edited and prepared for performance. In a word, the modern Lithuanian violin repertory is directly linked to Katilius, who has worked with these composers in the development of avant-garde violin techniques.

But this article is not meant simply to be a hymn of praise to Katilius. It is meant to put his tours into a larger perspective and to consider their implications.

The idea of a touring artist is a Romantic concept, and one that reaches full glory in the tours of Franz Liszt. To be sure, famous performers had traveled before - one thinks of the young Mozart visiting Paris and London in 1763 - but these were rare occurrences. With Franz Liszt this changes. Liszt, the consummate pianist, composer, and darling of the nobility, made notable tours of Russia, Turkey, Spain, and Ireland between the years 1839-47. His Russian tour was singularly important in that it encouraged the Russian nationalists, such as Balakirev, to develop their unique style. ¹ Liszt brought the masterpieces of Beethoven - including his own arrangements of the symphonies - to many parts of Europe that had never heard the works previously. In a word, it can be said that Liszt's tours changed the musical face of later 19th-century Europe.

Of course, this is an extreme example, but it instructs us as to the powerful influence a tour can have. With the 20th century, the touring artist becomes a common phenomenon. Trains, ships, and more recently, airplanes allowed concert artists to spend most of their careers going from city to city giving concerts, often with only a day or two of rest between engagements. Jascha Heifetz (born in Vilnius in 1901, died in Los Angeles, California in 1987) and Vladimir Horowitz (born in Kiev in 1904, died in New York 1989), to cite the most brilliant examples, created sensations throughout the world by reason of their astounding virtuosity, setting the standards for modern performance. But they did more than perform, for they premiered important compositions and influenced the type of repertory others performed. Horowitz, for example, introduced the works of Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) to the West, and, quite late in his career, re-introduced into the repertory some of the great piano sonatas of Muzio Clementi (1752-1832).

Musicologists have only recently begun to go beyond the analysis of the printed text to consider the reception histories of major works or the impact of such musical institutions as the court and the Church. And, more to the point, only recently has the deep musical significance of traveling musicians attracted attention. The traveling musician or touring virtuoso (this term itself is a Romantic coinage) is involved in the transmission of culture and can be a living witness to the changing values of a given society. Although the idea of a tour is less tangible than a musical document, it is no less worthy of study.

The connections between Katilius and American musicians began in 1989, when Dr. Dalia Kučėnas visited Lithuania to perform at the Vilnius Cathedral on the occasion of the return of Bishop A. Deksnys from exile. Dr. Kučėnas sang Franck's Panis Angelicus and Schubert's Ave Maria to Katilius' obbligato during the first Mass celebrated at the Vilnius Cathedral after having been a museum during the Communist regime.

The possibility of bringing Katilius to the United States was under discussion during the next several years. In 1991 I visited Lithuania to attend the Gaida Festival of Contemporary Music, a trip partially funded by the Lithuanian-American Community Cultural Council. I went to Lithuania to become acquainted with its leading composers and performers. During this visit I met Katilius and we discussed the possibility of an American tour with the inclusion of compositions by younger American composers. We also considered the importance of performing works by contemporary Lithuanian composers; thus the repertory proposed for these concerts was, in large part, to be modern and unknown. Our objective was to form ongoing connections between the leading young composers of the two countries.

Katilius began a series of important musical engagements in the United States in 1992. This first tour by Katilius was partially financed by the Lithuanian-American Community Cultural Council, whose president was Dr. Kučėnas. The officers and particularly Mr. Ernie Hollender helped with the complex arrangements. Mr. Hollender also acted as an agent for the subsequent tours, which were partially financed by private individuals who believed in their importance.

Katilius began his American tour with a concert at the Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall on March 8, 1992. This concert was sponsored by The Lithuanian-American Community Cultural Council. Katilius was accompanied by Larisa Lobkova, who was instrumental in the formation of Katilius' early career. The following was the program for that concert.

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PROGRAM

*Raimundas Katilius, Violin,
accompanied on the piano
by Larisa Lobkova*

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano	Béla Bartók
<i>Allegro appassionato</i>	
<i>Adagio</i>	
<i>Allegro</i>	
<i>Kol Nidre'i</i>	Joseph Dorfmann
- Intermission -	
Suite for Violin and Piano	Phillip Ramey
<i>Prelude (Moderato con moto)</i>	
<i>Elegy (Moderato)</i>	
<i>Scherzo (Allegro moderato)</i>	
<i>Aria (Andante con moto)</i>	
<i>March (Allegro moderato)</i>	
Sonatae for Violin Violin	Julius Andrejevas
<i>Black Sun</i>	Craig First
<i>Rain for Krakow</i>	Osvaldas Balakauskas
<i>Tzigane</i> for Violin and Piano	Maurice Ravel

Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall (57th St. and 7th Ave.)
Sunday March 8, 1992, 5: 30 pm
Sponsored by the Lithuanian-American Community Cultural Council



This concert was repeated in Chicago several times, principally at the Harold Washington Library Center on March 11, 1992

An examination of the program reveals that its contents were all modern. Unusual and unknown works were flanked by two of the masterpieces for the solo violin from this century: Bartok's Sonata No. 1 and Ravel's Tzigane. In order to give the reader an idea of two American works and an especially important Lithuanian composition, I quote from the extensive program notes I wrote for this American tour:

(Regarding the Suite for violin and piano, Phillip Ramey wrote the following):

"Composed in April 1971, at the MacDowell Colony, the Suite for Violin and Piano consists of five relatively brief movements. In the Prelude, dissonant violin doublestops are set against an impressionistically blurred accompaniment. The Elegy is rhetorical in character, beginning quietly, rising to a climax and subsiding. The rhythmic Scherzo has a brittle and sardonic tone, while the Aria is lyrical and harmonically ambiguous. Replete with virtuosic violin writing, the March provides an ending that is by turns barbaric and fantastical."

[Craig P. First's] Black Sun was commissioned by violinist Davis Brooks of the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra and the New York Chamber Symphony. The title is taken from Charles Baudelaire's poem "The Desire to Paint" from his collection Pans Spleen.

First writes: "Black Sun employs chromatic pitch sets as the principal motivic material. These sets undergo various permutations, but are controlled by a descending four-octave scale, the work's shaping force. The fabric is created by simultaneous projections of motivic cells in different permutations and rhythms, often providing polyrhythmic complexity. In addition, motion in the work is directed by gradual changes of tempo, register, and rhythmic activity."

The Rain for Krakow (1991) by Balakauskas is characteristic in that it consists in the words of its author "of textural variations of a three- or four-tone microtonal idea." The initial gesture increases in tension as the work evolves, demanding the highest level of virtuosity of the violinist. [2](#)

These works are on the cutting edge of modern technique and performance requirements. They also demonstrate the special quality of this American tour. Instead of choosing conventional crowd pleasers, Katilius dared to program the most unconventional works, learned amidst the continuous pressures of his European performances.

Dovetailed among these performances were two all-Beethoven programs on March 15, 1992 at the Cleveland Music School Settlement and on March 29, 1992 in the Museum Auditorium in Philadelphia. Performed were the Sonata Op. 12, No. 1 (1798); the Sonata Op. 24 (Spring) (1801), and the Op. 47 (Kreutzer) (1803), with Antanas Smetona as pianist. This concert showed that Katilius is always concerned with the architecture of a program - in this case the evolution of Beethoven's violin style from the early through the middle periods. It should be added that Katilius has often performed the entire cycle of Beethoven sonatas.

Katilius returned to the United States in 1994, this time with a different program and accompanied by Leonid Dorfman, the Lithuanian pianist who now resides in Germany. Katilius undertook a staggering schedule of 13 concerts between March 10th and March 26th of that year. This tour was described as a "blitz" tour because of the large number of engagements in rapid succession:

- March 10 St. Joseph High School in St. Joseph, Michigan
- March 11 Midwest Museum of American Art in Elkhart, Indiana
- March 12 LaPorte Symphony Orchestra, Indiana
- March 13 St. Joseph High School, Michigan (also a masterclass)
- March 15 Maria High School, Chicago
- March 16 North Lakeside Cultural Center, Chicago
- March 19 Harold Washington Library, Chicago
- March 19 Lithuanian Lutheran Church, Chicago
- March 20 Northern Indiana Arts Organization, Munster
- March 22 Roosevelt University, Chicago (also a masterclass)
- March 24 Charlston, Chicago
- March 25 Lithuanian Museum of Art, Lemont
- March 26 Flynn Art Center and Theater, Sawyer, Michigan

A typical concert was offered at the Harold Washington Library center. Highlighted were two major sonatas from the Romantic period: Grieg's Sonata in c minor (1886-7) and Franck's sonata in A major (1886). Other works included Prokofiev's gloomy "War" sonata in f minor (1938-46) - a work not often heard - and Paganini's brilliant variations on a theme from Rossini's Moses in Egypt (c. 1819). First's Two by one (1993) was composed specifically for Katilius. It is conceived as a "duet" for solo instrument, with sharply contrasting dynamics and registries changes. The idea of a solo violin work is here pushed to an extreme in that the solo violin is transformed into two violins, hence its title. It is also a work inspired by the peculiar nature of Katilius' performing gifts. The inclusion of this work was significant and resulted from my introduction of Katilius to First. The marvelous performances of Black Sun on the previous American tour led to the composition of the present work.

In 1995 Katilius again returned to the United States, this time to appear with the Sheboygan Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Guy Victor Bordo. This performance of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 (Turkish) K. 219 (1775) was the first time the American public heard Katilius with orchestra. Those who heard this performance (I, unfortunately, could not) were struck by its elegance and clarity. The fidelity to the Mozart style was also apparent. This demonstrates that Katilius is equally at home in the Olympian beauties of Mozart as he is in the torturous difficulties of avant-garde music.

A characteristic program was given at Butler University on March 27, 1995. This program consisted of three major works for violin and piano from the 19th century, followed by Ravel's Tzigane - heard in the previous tour. The program opened with Schumann's Sonata in a minor (1851), a late and introspective work, and continued with Beethoven's Kreutzer. Included on this concert was Schubert's great Fantasie in C (1827). This unduly neglected masterpiece is a bold experiment. Like the better known Wanderer Fantasy for piano (1822), this Fantasie interconnects movements and employs cyclic transformation of kernel thematic material to create overall unity. The slow movement is a series of variations on Schubert's own song "Sei mir gegrüsst," thus relating it to the Wanderer Fantasy and several other instrumental works that employ song melodies in the slow movements. The prodigious difficulty of this violin work is perhaps the reason it is so rarely performed.

An extremely interesting concert was held under the auspices of the Chicago 20th Century Music Ensemble at the Harold Washington Library Center on March 16, 1995.



PROGRAM

RAIMUNDAS KATILIUS, Violin
DIMITRIS MARINOS, Mandolin

•Modern Violin and Mandolin: East to West•

Third Concerto for Violin Solo (1984)	Eduardas Balsys (1919-84)
I. Prelude	
II. Fugue	
III. Chaconne	
IV. Toccata	

Raimundas Katilius)

Taksim (1991)	Michalis Lapidakis (b. 1960)
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Dimitris Marinos

Epiphany (1994) (<i>Word premiere</i>)	C. P. First (b. 1960)
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Raimundas Katilius, Dimitris Marinos

B Tantrum (1992)	C. P. First
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Dimitris Marinos

Kol Nidre'i	Joseph Dorfman
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This concert combined the solo virtuosity of Katilius with that of Dimitris Marinos, the Greek mandolin virtuoso. Again a premiere was heard: First's Epiphany. I have written an extensive analysis of Epiphany for the pages of *Lituanus*. [3](#) In order to put this work in the context of the present article, however, I note that it resulted from a chain of personal connections. Dr. Kučėnas introduced me to Katilius, I introduced Katilius to First, who, in turn, introduced Katilius to Marinos. These associations resulted in one of the most original compositions of the modern repertory, for a combination of instruments untried before. This concert represented the blending of Greek and Lithuanian performers and composers. In a commentary written soon after this concert, I noted that several of the works were for solo violin - always a special challenge for a violinist:

The concert consisted of five intricate compositions. The first was Eduardas Balsys' Third Concerto for solo Violin (1984), which illustrates a control of Baroque forms in non-tonal counterpoint. This was followed by Taksim (1991) for mandolin solo by the Greek composer Michalis Lapidakis, written specially to show off Marinos' uncanny playing ability. Marinos is unique among mandolinists in his excursions into the most complicated modern repertory. The Tantrum (1992) for solo mandolin by First then followed - a work which lives up to its name through the use of frenetic technical patterns and an extraordinary range of dynamics. The Kol Nidre'i (1975) for solo violin by Joseph Dorfman was played with passion and drama. This is a work I heard several years ago and remember for its fervid intensity. The culminating work was the Epiphany (1994) for amplified violin, mandolin, and tape by First, which demanded the utmost precision of ensemble of the participants but also was an expressive foray into the colors resulting from this unique combination of instruments. If there exists another work for this combination, I do not know of it. Certainly, no other performers would be capable of realizing a performance to equal this one of this premiere.

The tours described above were, in part, a result of my trip to Lithuania. In turn, they began a series of personal connections and performance opportunities that had continuing impact. For example, First and Marinos visited Lithuania on several occasions between the years 1992-4, including a participation in the Gaida festival of Contemporary Music. My own work on Lithuanian composers, particularly Balakauskas, was, in part, stimulated by Katilius. [4](#) Balakauskas and Katilius are close friends and, indeed, Balakauskas has recently written a Violin concerto for Katilius. The "American" connection has also resulted in a CD recording of one of the most demanding violin concertos of our time. (See appendix) These concerts described above also led to further American engagements in 1997 in Long Island, New York and Cincinnati, with Golda Weinberg as accompanist. In conclusion, I return to the idea at the outset of the article. Like Liszt in the 19th century, Katilius in our period has introduced repertory and inspired international connections. His extraordinary willingness to learn new music and to foster the kind of complex associations discussed in this article earn him the title of "Lithuania's musical ambassador."

APPENDIX:

Katilius on CD recordings:

Garsų Pasaulis, 1997 VSCD-021.

This CD consists of shorter, and for the most part, lighter works. Even here some rarities are found: Brahms' Scherzo in c minor and Schubert's exquisite Rondo in b minor. The final work on this recording is Faustas Latėnas' (1956-) unusual Lacrimarum samba... Lacrimarum, which is a minimalist transformation of the Samba style. The title reminds one of the "lacrimarum" works for lute and voice by the English Renaissance composer John Dowland (1563-1626). (The Latin word "lacrimarum" means "of tears" and was used by Dowland and Latėnas to refer to the dolorous quality of these works.)

The Orchestral Music of Meyer Kupferman, vol. 6, Fantasy concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1995) Soundspells Productions CD 119.

Commissioned in the 1970s, this concerto was not completed for over twenty years. The opening clarinet melody provides the basis for the arch form. Although the work is in one movement, a scherzo section and gradual return to the opening material articulate the structure. Two major cadenzas give further contrast, resulting in a four-part structure. The influence of Schonberg and particularly the Berg Violin Concerto (1935) are evident in this post-tonal composition. One is struck by the extremes of virtuosity (I suspect that the violinist for whom it was originally written found the difficulties impossible of execution) and the eclecticism. It would take a Katilius to realize such a score.

Future CDs are forthcoming: one with Petras Geniušas will record Beethoven's Kreutzer sonata and Brahms Sonata No. 3; the other, with Golda Weinberg, will feature Ravel, Debussy, and Fauré. These should be issued within this year.



From left to right: John Corigliano, composer of the opera *The Ghosts of Versailles* (premiered at the Metropolitan Opera, 1991); Phillip Ramey, composer of the *Suite for Violin and Piano*, performed by Katilius during the 1992 tour, and Katilius.

This was taken after the New York concert on March 8, 1992. Photo by V. Maželis

1 Sacheverell Sitwell, Liszt (New York: Dover, 1967), 280-7.

2 Enrique Alberto Arias, Notes for the Concerts by Raimundas Katilius (1992).

3 "Epiphany and Epiphanies of the Mandolin," *Lituanus* 41(1995): 56-63.

4 "Reflections from a Distant Mirror: Osvaldas Balakauskas' Requiem in Memoriam Stasys Lozoraitis," *Lituanus* 43 (1997): 5-28.