

Vladas JAKUBĖNAS



Chamber and Instrumental Music

String Quartet, Op. 4

Two Pictures, Op. 2, for piano

Melody-Legend for violin and piano

Serenade for cello and piano

Prelude and Triple Fugue for strings

Vilnius String Quartet

Kasparas Uinskas, piano

Kaskados Piano Trio

St Christopher Chamber Orchestra

Donatas Katkus, conductor

FIRST RECORDINGS

VLADAS JAKUBENAS: CHAMBER AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

by Rita Nomicaitė

The 1920s and '30s were unique decades in the history of Lithuania, marked by rapid expansion in all spheres of life. After several hundred years of occupation, the country had regained its independence in 1918 and declared itself a republic. This new beginning was marked by an atmosphere of idealism and openness, enthusiasm and creativity.

The vibrant mood and confident cultural life of the period created a favourable environment for the emergence of Jakubėnas' musical personality. He was not an ivory-tower composer, shut off from everyday life: he was also an important teacher and musical activist, and the critic of the daily newspaper *Lietuvos aidas*. His creative legacy thus includes not only approximately ninety compositions but also more than 1,000 articles for books and periodicals;¹ indeed, the question of which of his contributions to Lithuanian music – as composer or as critic – is the more important still provokes discussion.

Vladas Jakubėnas was born in Biržai on 15 May 1904. In predominantly Catholic Lithuania, this northern town had been an important centre of the Protestant Reformation since the sixteenth century; the composer's father, Povilas Jakubėnas, was superintendent general of the Lithuanian Protestant Reformed Church. The fact that Vladas belonged to this denomination in the predominantly Catholic Lithuania was a determinant in his choice of an institute of higher education, and so in 1924 he left to study in Riga, the capital of Latvia. At the Riga Conservatoire he initially studied piano and composition, and later composition only, with Jāzeps Vītols.² This patriarch of Latvian music represented the St Petersburg school of composition, and

¹ A two-volume anthology of his writings was published in Lithuanian in 1994: *Vladas Jakubėnas: Straipsniai ir recenzijos*, ed. Loreta Venclauskienė, Lithuanian Music Academy, Vilnius – it is almost 1,200 pages long.

² Vītols (1863–1948) was a seminal figure in the establishment of Latvian musical culture, writing the first Latvian symphony (1888), string quartet (1899) and piano sonata (1885). He also composed a generous quantity of both solo and choral songs – around 100 of each.

so, Jakubėnas later said, his course in composition was ‘rigorous, systematic and comprehensive, developed along the lines of Rimsky-Korsakov.’³ During his time at the Conservatoire Jakubėnas wrote the short Romantic pieces *Du vaizdeliai* (‘Two Pictures’) for piano, which remain popular to this day.

Jakubėnas was much influenced by his studies in 1928–32 at the Berlin Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik, where his composition teacher was Franz Schreker, then the most widely performed living composer of opera after Richard Strauss. Notwithstanding his prominence, Jakubėnas regarded Schreker as a figure from a past age, but the time he spent in Berlin was nonetheless one of the most important periods in his professional life. He wrote his most modern works while studying there; the most interesting of his later compositions are also the fruit of his years in Berlin. Much of this CD consists of music from this ‘Berlin period’ – works which earned Jakubėnas the sobriquet ‘the Lithuanian Hindemith’. As the label suggests, he felt a strong attraction to Neoclassicism; this fresh and temperate style marks his *Prelude and Triple Fugue* for strings in D minor, the String Quartet in A minor and the *Melody-Legend* for violin and piano. These works were all performed at public concerts during his studies in Berlin; the String Quartet was included in a programme of concerts organised in 1932 to promote the activities of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in Berlin. That same year Schreker conducted Jakubėnas’ First Symphony at a public concert of the Berlin Radio. Another important international hearing came in 1934, when Eric DeLamarer conducted the First Symphony in an all-Lithuanian concert given by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on 19 August during a ‘Lithuanian Day’ at the Chicago World’s Fair (‘A Century of Progress International Exposition’).⁴ Writing in *The Daily News* the next day, Eugene Stinson reported that

³ Quoted from Jakubėnas’ manuscript for the programme notes of his 70th-anniversary concert (preserved in the Žilėvičius-Kreivėnas Musicology Archives in Chicago).

⁴ This concert was held at the Swift Bridge Open Air Auditorium in Chicago, with the Swift packing company as the sponsor of the 75-piece orchestra, which made it possible to organise this event free of charge. Besides Jakubėnas’ First Symphony, the first part of the concert, conducted by DeLamarer, featured a symphonic poem, *Ruduo* (‘Autumn’), by Juozas Naujalis (1869–1934), *Karžygių maršas* (‘March of the Warriors’), *Undinių šokis* (‘Dance of the Mermaids’) and *Raganų šokis* (‘Dance of the Witches’) by Jurgis Karnavičius (1884–1941). The second part, conducted by Antanas Olis, presented a potpourri of ten Lithuanian songs and several dances, also featuring folksongs and children’s dances. The entire programme was broadcast by radio stations across the United States. For more information, cf. Danutė Petrauskaitė, ‘Symphony Concerts in the Musical Life of Lithuanians in the USA. Interaction of National Spirit and American Tradition’, *Lituanus*, Vol. 49, No. 3, Fall 2003 (at www.lituanus.org).

Jokubenas' [sic] Symphony is powerful. Written in the modernist's athletic manner, with short, acrobatic themes, the symphony proceeds nevertheless with an undercurrent of feeling that modernist composers are by no means unanimous in contriving either to possess or stimulate. The workmanship throughout the work is of the finest quality, and its structure is both well balanced and strong.

The 'Berlin' works differ considerably from the more Romantic ones Jakubėnas was to write upon his return to Lithuania in 1932, after he had completed his studies. Such a divergence in style raises questions which can perhaps never be answered. His contemporaries recorded that he admitted to resorting to a more moderate music language – unlike his crusading contemporary Jeronimas Kačinskas (1907–2005), whose radical, atonal athematicism was met by incomprehension. But can a creative personality consciously keep to such a decision? In some works Jakubėnas' temperate modernism became late Romanticism (in his solo and choral songs), or a blend of Romanticism and Impressionism (Symphony No. 2 in A minor, the *Rhapsody* in E minor for symphony orchestra and *Rhapsody-Serenade* for cello and piano). His Symphony No. 3 in D major, written during the Second World War, shows traces of Brahms.

Jakubėnas' emigration, in 1944 to Germany, fleeing before the Soviet army to join his family in a refugee camp, and in 1949 to the USA, appears to have extinguished his creative urge. His initial intention had been to settle in England, where he toured as an accompanist in 1948–49: he enjoyed the high cultural achievements of British life and the European environment. But restrictions on immigration into the UK made America a more practicable option, and so he turned his attention there, settling in Chicago, perhaps attracted by the large – and mutually supportive – Lithuanian community already living there. In Chicago he made his hard-pressed living by giving lessons in piano and music theory, acting as vocal coach and teaching in local high schools. He was also busy in the Lithuanian community, accompanying singers at the piano, playing the organ in church, organising concerts and writing for the local Lithuanian press. His activities left him little time to compose, and he seems to have abandoned any hope of reviving his earlier career; instead, he now spent most of his time revising the scores he had written in Lithuania, for various combinations of performers. He wrote a suite for symphony orchestra, *Miško šventė* ('Forest Celebration'), based on surviving fragments of the ballet *Vaivos juosta* ('The Fairy Belt of Vaiva' – in Lithuanian mythology Vaiva is a girl who drops her belt, which is transformed into a rainbow) – it had been lost during

the War – and reworked five of its fragments into piano pieces. One of these pieces, ‘Mažoji vėliniuko šokis’ (‘Dance of the Imp’), from 1944, won second prize in a competition organised by the Chicago branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music at DePaul University in 1962. His *Intermezzo Rustico* for strings (1962) was later performed at a concert organised by the same branch. Jakubėnas died in Chicago on 13 December 1976.

His creative legacy includes the three symphonies, the piano score of the ballet *Vaivos juosta*, four cantatas for choir and instrumental accompaniment (two of them based on elaborations of Protestant hymns), 30 songs and hymns for choir,⁵ 31 solo songs, seven works for various chamber ensembles and thirteen for piano. The predominant topos of the songs is the émigré’s longing for his homeland; the themes of autumn and death also feature prominently.

His musicological legacy is diverse, including extensive articles for encyclopaedias and dictionaries on the history of Lithuanian music, aesthetic and critical writings, monographs on composers and performers, and more. Over half of his published pieces are reviews of theatre productions and concerts.

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 4

The original two-movement version of Jakubėnas’ only string quartet, written in Berlin in 1929–30, was later supplemented by a third movement (no one knows when), the score of which was lost during the War. The first movement, marked *Allegro (non troppo)* [1], is in sonata form, with clear, traditionally developed themes. The second, *Adagio non troppo* [2], is one of the highlights of the Lithuanian quartet-literature. It is a polyphonic movement, in three sections, with Lithuanian folk-song motifs (contained within the minor third, characteristic of the oldest folk-songs from the Dzūkija region in the south of Lithuania) in the outer sections, and a motif in Dorian mode in the middle section (*Allegretto scherzando*); the movement thus tends more to a modal than to major/minor system of tonal organisation. With its frequently alternating meters and widely spread instrumental parts, this music evokes a feeling of wide-open space.

Two Pictures, Op. 2, for piano

These pieces – the first entitled ‘From the Land of Fairytales’ [3] and the second ‘Legend’ [4] –

⁵ Several of these compositions – including *The Song of the Exiles and the Deported* of 1956 – can be heard on Toccata Classics tocc 0028 (in preparation), in performances by Jauna Muzika, conducted by Václavas Augustinas.

were composed in Riga in 1926–27. They offer a distinctive combination of Romantic melodies, motivic dialogue between the hands, chordal textures in the culminating points – and some aspects of Impressionist style, such as modal progressions of third-related chords, textural patterns reminiscent of Debussy, the interplay of contrasting registers, and continuous ‘wave’ form with recapitulation.

Melody-Legend for violin and piano

One of Jakubėnas’ most poetic instrumental works, the *Melody-Legend* [5], written in Biržai and Berlin in 1930–31, is characterised by transparent textures, elements of imitative polyphony and an extended middle section within its ternary form. The melodic contour and the harmonic structure are again determined by a motif contained within the minor third typical of the Džukija region. Here the composer uses variant repetition and old heptatonic modes (Phrygian, for example). The folk-like middle section contrasts starkly with the outer sections, which are more traditional in melody and harmony.

Serenade for cello and piano

The original manuscript of the *Serenade* [6], written in Kaunas in 1936, has disappeared; fortunately the work was published during the Second World War, and so the music has survived. The alternative title of the piece, *Rhapsody-Serenade*, explains the form of this ten-minute composition (ABA, with various episodes of changing metre and tempo within each section). This elegant and sparkling work is Hispanic in temperament and does not resemble Jakubėnas’ usual, less spontaneous style. Here one finds a fullness of expression, abrupt contrasts in dynamics and registers, quasi-Spanish dance-rhythms and melodic turns. The texture in the piano part also imitates the sonorities of the guitar.

Prelude and Triple Fugue in D minor for string orchestra

This score, which Jakubėnas wrote in 1928–29 during his studies in Berlin, was found only recently thanks to the work of the German musicologist, pianist and violinist Kolja Lessing. It is a true Neoclassical piece. The Prelude [7], with its motoric movement and imitative polyphony, is half the length of the Fugue, to which it serves as an introduction. The first subject of the Fugue [8] is scherzo-like, the second is characterised by long notes and wider leaps, and the third is the liveliest.

The complex and dramatic development is created by emphasising one or another of the subjects. The structure of the fugue is based on the combination of all three subjects in their original form (that is, no inversion or retrograde, and so on). The only stable counterpoint, a downward chromatic passage within the span of a sixth, is applied to all three subjects, and thus becomes the leitmotif of this movement.

Rita Nomicaitė © 2012; translated by Vida Urbonavičius

Rita Nomicaitė, born in Vilnius in 1961, took a degree in musicology at the Lithuanian Academy of Music. After teaching at the Juozas Tallat Kelpša College of Music and the Vilnius Pedagogical University and working at the Lithuanian Composers' Union and the cultural weekly Dienovidis ('Noon'), since 1989 she has been employed as a musicologist in the Departments of Music Theory and History of the Institute of Musicology at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. She is currently music editor of the cultural weekly Literatūra ir menas ('Literature and Art'). She has written widely on Baltic music in the twentieth century, not least on Čiurlionis and Jakubėnas.

The creative work of the **Vilnius String Quartet**, now spanning almost five decades, has left a distinct trace on Lithuania's cultural scene. Ever since their debut in 1965, members of the Quartet have persistently polished their musicianship to win accolades both in Lithuania and abroad, as well as several important honours (including the first prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Liège in 1972, the Dr Antanas Razma Award in 2002, the Lithuanian National Award in 2004 and the Lithuanian Assembly Prize in 2005. Named after the city of Vilnius in 1973, the Quartet can select from a vast repertoire of over 450 works on its extensive international tours, averaging 80 concerts a year. The group specialises in the traditional string-quartet repertoire, including all the classics, but also performs over 150 contemporary works and about 100 quartet pieces by Lithuanian composers (half of them specially written for the ensemble).

The Quartet has developed a distinctive style derived from the Russian and Central European schools of string-quartet interpretation, with which they became familiar during their post-graduate studies at the Moscow Conservatory (with Viktor Gvozdetsky) and in Budapest (with András Mihály).

The Jakubėnas String Quartet was recorded by Audronė Vainiūnaitė (first violin), Petras Kunca (second violin until 1999, currently Artūras Šilalė), Girdutis Jakaitis (viola) and Augustinas Vasiliauskas (cello).

The Quartet's website can be found at www.filharmonija.lt/en/performers/vilnius-string-quartet.

The pianist **Kasparas Uinskas** began winning prizes in local competitions while still a student at the National M. K. Čiurlionis School of Arts. In 1997 he received a full scholarship at the Verbier Festival and Academy in Switzerland where he studied with Joseph Kalichstein and Bella Davidovich; later that year Uinskas began studying at the Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw. In 2000, he was a recital soloist and scholarship student at the Aspen Music Festival with Joseph Kalichstein and Jean-David Coen and featured soloist at South Shore Music, Inc. of Westport, Connecticut. In 2001 he was a participant at Pianofest in the Hamptons, New York, studying with Paul Schenly, Ane Vardi, and other faculty members. In 2002, he was a Moiseiwitsch Recital soloist at The Music Festival of the Hamptons in Bridgehampton, New York. From 2001–3 he studied with Joseph Kalichstein at The Juilliard School in New York as a recipient of the Vladimir Horowitz scholarship. In 2009 he obtained the Licentiate of Arts degree at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre where he studied with Veronika Vitaitė. Since bursting onto the international scene with a series of highly praised debut recitals around the world, Uinskas has performed with numerous orchestras and conductors and featured at many international music festivals in Europe and the USA. His solo and chamber repertoire embraces music from various epochs and countries, ranging from Bach to twentieth-century composers, but with special affinity to the works by Frédéric Chopin. Recent releases include Uinskas' debut CD of his Chopin recital in 2006 and a DVD of his concert at the Berlin Philharmonie in 2008. In addition to his successful career as recital and concert pianist, Uinskas is also actively involved in educational and entrepreneurial projects as the co-founder of the New Musical Generation, a public institution which promotes young talents by organising appearances at the world's most coveted venues as well as at festivals and summer academies in Lithuania.

His website can be found at www.uinskas.lt.

The **Kaskados Piano Trio** was founded in 1997 and took its name from a piano sonata by Osvaldas Balakauskas. The group has achieved considerable success in Lithuania and has toured in Austria, Germany and Russia. In 2002 the Trio won first prize in the Johannes Brahms international chamber ensembles competition in Pörschach, Austria.

A significant portion of the Trio's interpretational energy is devoted to modern Lithuanian music. The Trio has formed creative partnerships with a number of Lithuanian composers, performing their newly written pieces and specially made transcriptions alongside Classical and Romantic works. It also has developed a long-standing collaboration with the British composer Sadie Harrison and has recorded her works for NMC Recordings in the UK .

Rusnė Mataitytė (violin), a graduate of the National M. K. Čiurlionis School of Arts in Vilnius and the Moscow Conservatory, studied with Viktor Radovich, Valery Klimov and Igor Bezrodny, winning prizes at the David Oistrakh and Ludwig Spohr violin competitions. She appears in recital with her long-standing duo-partner, the pianist Margrit-Julia Zimmermann, is a principal violin at the Göttingen Chamber Orchestra, a member of the Gaida Ensemble and a co-founder of the Kaskados music festival in Germany, and has many appearances as a concerto soloist to her credit. She is also an accomplished artist, and frequently accompanies her recitals with exhibitions of her musically inspired paintings.

Edmundas Kulikauskas (cello) is likewise a graduate of the National M. K. Čiurlionis School of Arts in Vilnius and the Moscow Conservatory where he studied with Natalya Shakhovskaya. He is active both as a soloist and as a member of various chamber ensembles, such as the Gaida Ensemble. He is also leader of the cello section at the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra.

Albina Šikšniūtė (piano) gave her first performance with the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra while still a pupil at the National M. K. Čiurlionis School of Arts in Vilnius. She graduated from the Moscow Conservatory where she studied with Viktor Nosov. She combines her concert activities with teaching: she heads the piano department at the National M. K. Čiurlionis School of Arts, teaches at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, and leads the international summer courses for young pianists in Krems an der Donau, Austria.

Their website can be found at <http://triokaskados.lt>.

Founded in 1994 through the initiative of Donatas Katkus, the **St Christopher Chamber Orchestra** of the Municipality of Vilnius was previously known as the Vilnius Chamber Orchestra. In 1995, it was named after St Christopher, the patron of the city of Vilnius. In 1998, it was granted the status of a municipal orchestra.

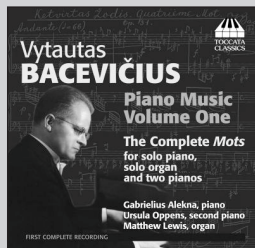
During its eighteen years of existence, the orchestra has gained national and international recognition, giving up to 80 concerts and preparing about fifteen new programmes a year. Ranging from the Baroque to the contemporary, its repertoire feature works by over thirty Lithuanian composers – including almost all the music for strings by Feliksas Bajoras, Bronius Kutavičius and Osvaldas Balakauskas – but without neglecting foreign composers, among them Pēteris Vasks, Erkki-Sven Tüür, John McCabe, Sadie Harrison, Shih, Axel Ruoff and Roberto Sierra. The orchestra is well known as a daringly innovative ensemble, eager to expand its repertoire and constantly involved in a number of original projects, including jazz performances, rock operas and pop events.

The St Christopher Chamber Orchestra has recorded over twenty CDs for Naxos, Fleur de Son Classics (USA), Ambitus (Germany), BIS (Sweden), Dutton, Metier and NMC (UK) and other labels.

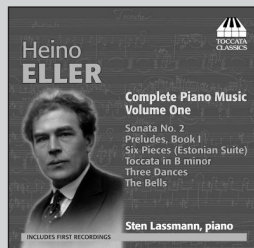
Donatas Katkus, the artistic director and conductor of the St Christopher Chamber Orchestra, has been in charge since its inception. Conductor, violist, teacher and musicologist, he is a graduate of the Vilnius and Moscow Conservatories and has also participated in master classes in Budapest. In 1965 he founded the Vilnius String Quartet and for 29 years was a member, touring the world with it. Donatas Katkus is a professor at the Lithuanian Academy of Music, where he teaches chamber ensemble and string quartet. He has been running master-classes in Pommersfelden (Germany) since 1995, the year in which he also became artistic director of the St Christopher Summer Music Festival in Vilnius. In 2001 he was awarded the Lithuanian National Arts and Culture Prize, and in 2003 the prize of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). In 2012, on the occasion of his 70th anniversary, he was decorated with the honorary insignia 'Carry Your Light and Faith' by the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture.



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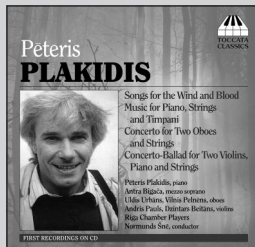
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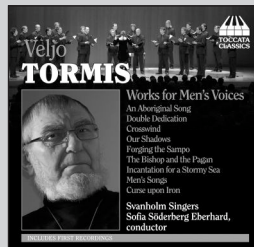
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TOCC 0073



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As composer, critic, teacher and musical activist, Vladas Jakubėnas (1904–76) was one of the major cultural figures in pre-World War II Lithuania, before his post-War exile in the USA. As a student of Schreker in Berlin in 1928–32, he initially wrote in a Neoclassical style – as most of the works on this CD attest – and was nicknamed ‘the Lithuanian Hindemith’. Back home, he began to compose in a late-Romantic, gently modernist idiom, tinged with the influence of Lithuanian folk-music.



TOCC 0013

VLADAS JAKUBĖNAS Chamber and Instrumental Music

String Quartet, Op. 4 (1929–30)

25:29

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--|-------|
| 1 | I. | <i>Allegro</i> | 10:45 |
| 2 | II. | <i>Adagio non troppo. Allegretto scherzando. Andante mosso. Adagio</i> | 14:44 |

Two Pictures, Op. 2, for piano (1926–27)

6:21

- | | | | |
|---|-------|-------------------------------|------|
| 3 | No. 1 | ‘From the Land of Fairytales’ | 3:04 |
| 4 | No. 2 | ‘Legend’ | 3:17 |

5 Melody-Legend for violin and piano (1930–31)

6:32

6 Serenade for cello and piano (1936)

10:10

Prelude and Triple Fugue in D minor for string orchestra (1928–29)

16:40

- | | | |
|---|---------|-------|
| 7 | Prelude | 4:52 |
| 8 | Fugue | 12:00 |

TT 65:28

Vilnius String Quartet 1, 2

FIRST RECORDINGS

Kasparas Uinskas, piano 3, 4 Rusnė Mataitytė, violin 5

Edmundas Kulikauskas, cello 6 Albina Šikšniūtė, piano 5, 6

St Christopher Chamber Orchestra; Donatas Katkus, conductor 7, 8

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