



**ONDINE**

# **JURGIŠ KARNAVIČIUS**

**String Quartets Nos. 1 & 2**

**Vilnius String Quartet**

## JURGIS KARNAVIČIUS (1884–1941)

|   |   |              |
|---|---|--------------|
|   | <b>String Quartet No. 1, Op. 1 (1913)</b>                 | <b>34:46</b> |
| 1 | I. Allegro moderato                                       | 11:00        |
| 2 | II. Allegro – Moderato – Allegro                          | 7:08         |
| 3 | III. Andante – Poco più mosso – Moderato – Poco più lento | 8:47         |
| 4 | IV. Allegro   | 7:47         |
|   | <b>String Quartet No. 2, Op. 6 (1917)</b>                 | <b>41:37</b> |
| 5 | I. Molto moderato – Allegro moderato                      | 12:45        |
| 6 | II. Allegretto – Sostenuto – Allegretto                   | 10:03        |
| 7 | III. Andante  | 10:42        |
| 8 | IV. Allegro   | 8:07         |

*World première recordings*

### VILNIUS STRING QUARTET

DALIA KUZNECOVAITĖ, 1st violin • ARTŪRAS ŠILALĖ, 2nd violin

KRISTINA ANUSEVIČIŪTĖ, viola • AUGUSTINAS VASILIAUSKAS, cello

## Epoch-unveiling music

This album revives Jurgis Karnavičius' (1884–1941) chamber music after many years of oblivion. It features two of his four String Quartets, written in 1913–1925 while he was still living in St. Petersburg. Due to the turns and twists of the composer's life these magnificent 20th century chamber music opuses were performed extremely rarely after his death, thus the more pleasant discovery awaits all who will listen to these recordings.

The Vilnius String Quartet has proceeded with a meaningful initiative to discover and resurrect those pages of Lithuanian quartet music that allow a broader view of Lithuanian music and testify to the internationality of our musical culture and connections with global music communities in momentous moments of the development of both Lithuanian and European music. In early stages of the 20th-century, not only Lithuanian national art, but also the concept of contemporary music and the ideas of international cooperation of musicians were formed on a global scale.

Jurgis Karnavičius is a significant figure in Lithuanian music not only as a composer, having produced the first Lithuanian opera of the independence period – *Gražina* (based on a poem by Adam Mickiewicz) in 1933, but also as a personality, active in the orbit of the international community of contemporary musicians. His uniqueness was determined by the fact that in 1927, after returning from Russia to live in Lithuania and deciding to be a composer of Lithuanian music, Karnavičius was already a formed musician moulded by the musical realm of the St. Petersburg Conservatory and culture of this megapolis. His music harboured the subtle aesthetics of the modern music of Silver Age. However, his vocabulary was quite unique in the Lithuanian context and did not beget following, so for a long time Karnavičius remained “a stranger at home and at home among strangers”. Fortunately, the focus

on his legacy has been growing again lately. His music turns out to be interesting and of importance, which testifies to his compositional mastery and aesthetic subtlety, and provides a refreshing artistic experience for performers and listeners.

Jurgis Karnavičius was born in Kaunas in 1884, grew up in Vilnius. In 1903, having changed his name to Jurijus Karnovičius, he went to study in St. Petersburg, where in 1908 graduated from the Faculty of Law at St. Petersburg University, and in 1912 – from St. Petersburg Conservatory (studies with Anatoly Lyadov, Jāzeps Vītols, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Glazunov and Maximilian Steinberg). In 1913, Karnavičius began teaching theoretical disciplines in his alma mater, becoming its professor in 1919. In 1914, with the outbreak of the World War I, Karnavičius was mobilized into the Russian army. In 1915, he fell into German captivity and until 1918 lived in a prison camp at Josefstadt, near Vienna.

After returning to Petrograd (St. Petersburg had been renamed at that time), Karnavičius became actively involved in Russian contemporary music movement, where he joined the New Music Circle. In 1926, he became the chairman of the Leningrad Contemporary Music Association, founded a year earlier and having nurtured plans to cooperate with the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM). According to musicologist Rūta Stanevičiūtė, who researched the activities of the ISCM (in the book *Modernumo lygtys* [Modernity Equations], 2015), Karnavičius was generally the first artist from Lithuania to join organizations related to the ISCM. However, in his music, at that time Karnavičius mostly focused on chamber and symphonic works as well as songs, the composer did not favour modernism. He followed a moderate aesthetic line formed during his studies with Maximilian Steinberg, a disciple of Rimsky-Korsakov and a nurturer of traditions.

In 1927, probably due to the depressing and deteriorating situation in post-revolutionary Leningrad, Karnavičius decided to return with his family to Lithuania

for good. Here he did not join the initiatives of local music progressives, all the more so as these were prompted by the musicians of the next generation and different aesthetics acting in cultural environment of Kaunas, which had not yet become home to Karnavičius. The composer focused on writing music for theatre: he composed two operas (*Gražina*; *Radvila Perkūnas*), four ballets, and music for drama productions. In addition, up until 1933 he played the viola in the Kaunas State Theatre orchestra, and until his death in 1941 taught at Kaunas Conservatory, where he was granted the professorship. However, after Karnavičius established himself in Lithuania as a composer of music for stage, his previous works, including four string quartets, did not receive due attention. On the other hand, according to Rūta Stanevičiūtė, many representatives of modern music (Nikolai Tcherepnin, Steinberg, Vladimir Rebikov, and others) associated with Russian Silver Age culture of the beginning of the 20th century remained on the side-lines of history, overshadowed by the avant-garde and modernist music, which emerged after the World War I. According to Stanevičiūtė, it was the Russian modern culture of the beginning of the 20th century that formed Karnavičius' music aesthetics and stylistics, which remained relevant throughout his life.

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Karnavičius composed the First String Quartet in 1913 upon graduating from St. Petersburg Conservatory. For the opus he was honoured with the prize sponsored by Mitrofan Belyayev. However, the Quartet was premiered in 1916, when the composer was already at the front, so he was not present at the performance. The performances of Karnavičius' works during the war were organized by the *Muzikal'niy sovremennik* (Music Contemporary) magazine, edited by Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov. In 1915, after receiving the news about the planned performance of his First String Quartet,

Karnavičius wrote:

*“I will hurry up to finish off the Hungarians so that I can be in time for your quartet’s performance of my Quartet. If we are to believe the newspapers, we have long since eliminated the Hungarians and the Germans [...] But someone is still shooting from the mountain and not allowing us into the blissful valley of Hungary [...] Just before leaving, I have read a lot of Jack London; it is an invaluable literature for anyone who spends winter and spring outdoors – it keeps the spirit sound and warms the blood. Add to that warm fur coat (a wife’s gift), felt boots and lots of fitch inside (a person gets 1 pound per day) – and the harsh nature is overcome! How we defeat the Austrians is a real mystery [...] When we seize a location, we always sincerely wonder for a long time how we did it.”* (Quoted from the book *Modernumo lygtys* [Modernity Equations])

It was one of Karnavičius’ last letters from the front. He was soon taken prisoner and did not participate in the premiere of the work.

The First String Quartet in G minor belongs to his early creative period. It is a classically transparent opus written in a 4-movement form typical of the genre. According to musicologist Jūratė Burokaitė (an author of the book *Jurgis Karnavičius*, 2004), the composer himself described it as the beginning of his creative path.

The Second String Quartet in D minor was written in 1917 under special conditions: in captivity. It was in this work more than in the First Quartet that the echoes of the Silver Age worldview were revealed. While still a four-movement structure, the Second Quartet features more intonational semantic “plans”, harmonic twists, that lend the sound a special finesse. The boundaries of tonality are expanded here, the music abounds with drama and contrasts. Later, Karnavičius combined the Second Quartet in D minor with other works written in captivity (*Poem* for Cello and Piano, a cycle of 6 romances based on the lyrics of Percy Bysshe Shelley) to make a programme *The Fall of the House of Usher* (after the short story of Edgar Allan Poe, his favourite writer), which he deemed to be performed during one evening.

When the composer returned to St. Petersburg, the Second String Quartet was performed in one of the evening-meetings organized by the Contemporary Russian Music Propaganda Society active in 1923. In addition to the already mentioned groups, Karnavičius took part in the activities of this and other societies and groups related to the performance of contemporary music where he was involved not only as a composer, but also as a performer and organizer.

The Second Quartet could hypothetically have been performed earlier, at the camp in Josefstadt, where the tireless Karnavičius had assembled a string quartet and played viola in it. It is known that concerts in the camp were held quite often, because, according to Karnavičius' testimony: "everyone lives not only on one street, but also in one house, no one walks anywhere in the evenings, so there are no chances that someone 'could not come'" (from Jurgis Karnavičius' letter, quoted in the book *Modernumo lygtys* [Equations of Modernity]). Aside his works of chamber music, while at the camp Karnavičius also wrote a symphonic poem *Ulalume* after E. A. Poe.

The four String Quartets by Jurgis Karnavičius not only provide an opportunity to enjoy unfamiliar and idiosyncratic music that promises discovery, but also unveils the music epoch of the beginning of the 20th century, in which echoes of the fragile post-revolutionary moods marked by the aesthetics, enthusiasm and disappointments of the Silver Age are intertwined.

**Beata Baublinskienė**

## **VILNIUS STRING QUARTET**

DALIA KUZNECOVAITĖ (1st violin)

ARTŪRAS ŠILALĖ (2nd violin)

KRISTINA ANUSEVIČIŪTĖ (viola)

AUGUSTINAS VASILIAUSKAS (cello)

For fifty-five years the Vilnius String Quartet, a recipient of several prestigious prizes, has been enjoying the reputation of one of the leading collectives in the cultural life of Lithuania. Its performances have won accolades both in Lithuania and abroad.

The Quartet made its debut in 1965. In 1972, it was awarded the highest prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Liege (Belgium); in 1973, it was named after the city of Vilnius. In 1979, the Quartet received the State Prize, in 2002 Dr. Antanas Razma prize of the Lithuanian Foundation (USA), in 2004 the Lithuanian National Arts and Culture Prize, and in 2005 the Baltic Assembly Prize. In 2012, for its contribution to culture the Vilnius String Quartet was honoured with the St. Christopher Statuette.

The Vilnius String Quartet has always felt its mission in putting its namesake on the world map. Having toured around the world, the Quartet has appeared in the world's top concert halls and festivals. In 2013, on occasion of Lithuania's Presidency of the Council of the European Union the Vilnius String Quartet gave concerts in Egypt and France. The celebration of Lithuania's centenary in 2018 took the Quartet to Tel Aviv and Jaffa (Israel), Kiev, Lvov, Ivano-Frankovsk and Dnipro (Ukraine).

The Vilnius String Quartet has collaborated with both renowned masters and young performers. Its intriguing and remarkable programmes and concert series draw numerous audiences, refine their musical taste, introduce the Lithuanian listeners with both masterpieces and lesser-known repertoire. Annually, the Quartet presents its



connoisseurs with new opuses focusing on Lithuanian music having performed more than 100 works by Lithuanian composers (half of them being especially dedicated to the ensemble). The Vilnius String Quartet has been repeatedly invited to the recording studios in several countries; its numerous recordings are housed at the Lithuanian Radio archives. The Quartet's discography currently includes over 40 albums on various Lithuanian, as well as Russian, German, French, Finnish, Swedish, British and American labels.

Commissioned by the Ondine label, Vilnius String Quartet recorded the complete string quartets by Jurgis Karnavičius, a classic in Lithuanian music. The first two opuses were recorded with Augustinas Vasiliauskas, the Quartet's long-time cellist, and Nos. 3 and 4 with his student Deividas Dumčius.

"In the light of the Quartet's 55th anniversary, I would like to think about the shocks and upheavals of the 21st century, about this time, which is capable of bringing the cultural process to the background, stopping the continuation of traditions, locking down within. The passing on of cultural tradition stands for perpetual struggle with destructive force, with oblivion. Who else if not us, the representatives of the cultural world, are responsible for the survival of art, for the foundations of tomorrow's culture, for the values we will be guided by in life? I see it as one of my and the Quartet's biggest responsibilities and tasks", says Dalia Kuznecovaitė, the first violin of the Vilnius String Quartet.

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Muzgiz/Universal Edition Vienna (String Quartet No. 2)

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Ramybė (Tranquility), 1903 | Alamy



VILNIUS STRING QUARTET

# JURGIŠ KARNAVIČIUS (1884–1941)

- 1–4 **String Quartet No. 1, Op. 1** (1913) **34:46**
- 5–8 **String Quartet No. 2, Op. 6** (1917) **41:37**

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**[76:25] • English notes enclosed**

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