

ONDINE

ŽIBUOKLĖ MARTINAITYTĖ
SAUDADE

Giedrė Šlekytė

Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra

Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra

Gabrielius Alekna, piano



ŽIBUOKLĖ MARTINAITYTĖ

ŽIBUOKLĖ MARTINAITYTĖ (b. 1973)

1	Saudade (2019)	16:50
2	Millefleur (2018)	13:01
3	Horizons (2013)	20:39
	Chiaroscuro Trilogy (2017) For piano and string orchestra	18:45
4	I. Tunnel	8:20
5	II. Meteors	5:31
6	III. Darkness of Light	4:54

LITHUANIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA (1–3)

LITHUANIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA (4–6)

GABRIELIUS ALEKNA, piano (4–6)

GIEDRĖ ŠLEKYTĖ, conductor

Immersive External and Internal Beauty – The Orchestral Music of Žibuoklė Martinaitytė

By Frank J. Oteri

The music of Žibuoklė Martinaitytė conjures both the imposing grandeur and the fragile minutiae of the external and the internal world – the natural, physical domain of forests, mountains, oceans, sky, and the infinite cosmos, but also the realm of our consciousness as well as unconsciousness. But in this vast territory that she explores through sound, Martinaitytė focuses on beauty which she has stated serves both as “a guiding principle” and as “an aesthetic measure for sonic quality.”

Born to Lithuanian parents in St. Petersburg, Russia (then Leningrad in the Soviet Union), Martinaitytė grew up in Kaunas, Lithuania’s second largest city, and later pursued her composition studies at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (where her teachers included the celebrated composer Bronius Kutavičius) in Vilnius, Lithuania’s capital. She lived through years of her homeland’s enforced incorporation into the USSR and then during its subsequent emergence as an independent nation. For over a decade she has been based in New York City, although she frequently travels around the world for performances as well as to create her singular musical compositions in isolated physical environments. Although her home base has almost always been an urban environment, her creative fuel often comes from being able to more readily interact with nature. In recent years, she has been attracted to extended durations, which she sees as a personal fight against ever diminishing attention spans, and in poignant sonic metaphors for environmental concerns. Martinaitytė, who was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Lithuanian Government Award in 2020, has composed phenomenal music for a wide variety of idioms – chamber and solo pieces, electro-acoustic sound installations, and even vocal and choral works (though mostly without words). But the immersive aspect of her work, as well as its meticulous attention to details, is arguably most effectively conveyed in her output for symphony orchestra since it offers so many possible instrumental timbres and combinations. So it is a cause for celebration to finally have a full recording devoted exclusively to Martinaitytė’s orchestral music and, given the era we are currently living through, it seems truly extraordinary.

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“This album was recorded when most of the world was under a lockdown,” Martinaitytė explained. “Even the idea of having a live orchestra in a concert hall would have appeared almost utopian to many, as though existing in a parallel reality. Recording sessions were rescheduled several times and every time we all hoped it would happen. Finally it did! Nothing short of a miracle considering the widely spread geography of this recording project. Conductor Giedrė Šlekytė was coming from Austria and pianist Gabrielius Alekna, residing in New York, had to get a special permit from a cultural minister of Lithuania to be able to fly into the country. Then there was always the thought lingering in the back of one’s mind: ‘What if anybody gets infected with the virus?’ Uncertainty was our daily companion, but somehow we didn’t give into it.”

The four Martinaitytė compositions featured herein were composed within a span of a mere six years, but they form just a small fraction of her output during this time. While many of her compositions have long evocative titles (such as *A Thousand Doors to the World*, *Completely Embraced by the Beauty of Emptiness*, and *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*), the titles for each of the works here were generated from just single words.

“It’s uncanny how one single word can trigger one’s creative imagination,” claimed Martinaitytė. “Now and then I’ve come across mystifying and alluringly sounding foreign words that seemingly contained much larger and more complex set of meaning than their equivalent in other languages. When the ascribed profundity of the word started resonating with the emotions or experiences lived through, it almost begged to be translated into music.”

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The earliest of the four works featured here, ***Horizons***, was composed between May and September 2013 in New York City and Lithuania. It was commissioned by and premiered at the Gaida Festival, the largest and most prominent festival devoted to contemporary music in the Baltic States, which has taken place annually since 1991. Inspired by the movies *Cloud Atlas* and *The Hours* as well as Italo Calvino’s novel *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, Martinaitytė has attempted to do something impossible – create a piece of non-linear music.

“Throughout the piece,” as she elaborated in her program notes, “the listener undergoes a constant shift from one story to another, from one musical world to another, thus attempting to disintegrate the experience of a predictably logical sequence and to disrupt the linearity of time.”

Of course this is technically not possible, since music is performed and perceived in linear time, but *Horizons* simulates such a phenomenon by juxtaposing various musical fragments which emerge into the foreground and then recede into the background. These musical shards have no obvious relationship to each other and follow each other without any clearly perceptible transitions, e.g. a sequence of descending phrases is succeeded by insistently repeating chirping high-register notes. At nearly the halfway point, there is a passage in which the members of the cello section repeatedly play ghostly up and down scales of natural harmonics, each at their own pace. In the score, Martinaitytė offers the instruction "as though trying to paint a rainbow in the sky." A hint of that passage returns at the very end with the cellos gradually dropping out, stand by stand, until only one is left while a bass drum and gong maintain a steady, quiet tremolo.

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The ***Chiaroscuro Trilogy***, composed between April and August 2017 during residencies at Djerassi in California and the Blue Dragonfly Studio in Lithuania, was commissioned for the Gaida Festival by the Lithuanian Composers Union. It is the only work herein that does not employ a full orchestra; rather it is scored just for strings and a solo piano. Although Martinaitytė describes the piece as a trilogy and parses it into three separately named movements, they flow seamlessly into each other without a pause. (Her score does not even separate them with double bar lines.)

In the first part, "Tunnel," a quiet series of long sustained tones in the lower register and undulating figurations in the strings gradually gain in intensity against a series of chord clusters in the piano. Then the piano hammers out a series of tremolos that grow louder and louder before embarking on a frenetic cascade of notes that eventually shifts to a triumphant return of the clusters and culminates in a euphoric tremolo.

The second part, "Meteors," begins with radiant string harmonics. The piano enters with an upper-register tremolo, but ultimately descends to the bottom of its range against long held tones in the lower strings and open-string arpeggiations in the violins. If "Tunnel" outlines a gradual ascent; "Meteors" is clearly a descent.

But the final section, "Darkness of Light," is more ambivalent in terms of its directionality. At the onset, the piano takes over the role that the violins had immediately before, with a relentless up and down ostinato. But here it is phrased across subtly

shifting meters which keeps it from sounding like a completely steady flow. It is further punctuated by a series of single-tones on various beats across the full register of the strings. But eventually the piano takes a series of short pauses, further disrupting the flow, and finally the music ceases.

According to Martinaitytė, *chiaroscuro*, "a word that encompasses both darkness and light ... profoundly reflects the very essence of our existence. I was exploring darkness and light through sounds in varied proportions and their relation to one another. Every part of the trilogy focuses on a particular aspect of this relationship, encompassing a large scale of gradations from the light of darkness to the darkness of light."

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Millefleur, composed between July and August of 2018, was commissioned by and premiered during the Iš Arti International Festival of Contemporary Music in Kaunas. It is perhaps the subtlest of all of the works presented here. Often it seems static, but a closer listen reveals passages teeming with tons of miniscule movements. At times, some of these details rise to a foreground level, such as an almost military-sounding procession driven by a bass drum and a magical woodblock tremolo, which makes a brief, unaccompanied appearance.

Martinaitytė has described the work as "acoustic hedonism, a search for acoustic pleasures, as though walking through a beautiful sonic garden and taking delight in it." *Millefleur*, a French word which translates literally into "thousand flowers," is a name given to the backgrounds of Medieval and Renaissance European tapestries in which numerous different kinds of small plants are juxtaposed together. This is a motif also found in Chinese ceramics and Indian carpets. Martinaitytė was actually inspired by seeing the millefleur that permeate the mysterious Unicorn Tapestries, the earliest known record of which places them in the home of the French Duke de la Rochefoucauld in 1680, over a century before they were looted during the French Revolution; they now permanently hang at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Cloisters Museum which is a short walk from the composer's New York City home.

In this piece, Martinaitytė has translated these botanical representations into what she has described as "multiple microscopic sonic gestures, constantly shimmering with harmonics in string instruments or subtle dynamic swells in other orchestral groups.

Out of this gradually emerges a more pronounced main image, which later disappears into the background of flowers, thus forming a mirror-like compositional structure."

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The most recent of the works presented here, **Saudade**, composed between May and August 2019, was also commissioned by the Lithuanian Composers Union and also received its world premiere performance during the Gaida Festival. Of all the works herein, it is perhaps the one that is most deeply saturated with unusual performance techniques. Brass players are asked to sing while breathing into their mouthpieces which results in two distinct pitches, the one blown into the instrument and the one that is sung. Cymbals are placed on the drumheads of timpani while the player presses a foot pedal which stretches the drum head, causing the cymbal to shimmer. The harpist strikes a range of strings with the palm which makes a gong-like sound. These new sonorities add a further layer to Martinaitytė's vocabulary of long sustained tones and tremolos, repeated figurations, and various slides. But while it is one of her most innovative pieces, it is also perhaps the most deeply personal.

As she has explained, "Saudade in Portuguese means a deep emotional state of nostalgic or profound melancholic longing for an absent something or someone that one loves. It can be described as emptiness, when someone (parents, friends) or something (places, experiences) that should be there in a particular moment is missing, and the individual feels this desire for presence as opposed to absence. It brings sad and happy feelings together: sadness for missing and happiness for experiencing the past. In my personal experience this notion of Saudade symbolizes the stratum of multiple yearnings – the death of my father and my immigration to the USA. For the last decade this thread of longing has been woven into my life, coloring all experiences."

*Award-winning composer and music journalist **Frank J. Oteri** is the Editor of NewMusicBox, the web magazine from New Music USA, and the Vice President of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM).*

The winner of the second prize at the 2005 International Beethoven Piano Competition in Vienna, pianist **Gabrielius Alekna** has appeared as a soloist in Vienna's Musikverein with the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Bertrand de Billy. Alekna has also been a featured soloist with the Juilliard Orchestra, the New Amsterdam and Adelphi Symphony Orchestras in New York, Wartburg Community Symphony in Iowa, Bilkent Symphony Orchestra in Ankara, Turkey, and with the Belarus State Symphony Orchestra in Minsk, while in his native country the pianist appears regularly with major orchestras including the National Symphony, the State Symphony, Kaunas City Symphony Orchestras, the Christopher Chamber, and the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestras.

Described by Daniel Barenboim as "a highly gifted pianist and musician," Mr. Alekna has garnered more than a dozen top prizes in competitions on both sides of the Atlantic, such as Hilton Head (United States), Maria Canals (Spain), and Čiurlionis (Lithuania) International Piano Competitions. Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, Alekna graduated from the National M. K. Čiurlionis School for the Arts in Vilnius and continued his studies at the Lithuanian Music Academy. In 1996, Alekna was invited to attend the Juilliard School, where he studied with Jerome Lowenthal and becoming the first Lithuanian to earn a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Juilliard School. In 2003, Alekna was one of six pianists invited by Carnegie Hall for The Daniel Barenboim Workshop: The Beethoven Piano Sonatas. His recorded performances were broadcast on the BBC, Österreich 1, and EuroClassic radio programs in twelve European countries, while in the US he was heard on WQXR, WWFM, and on XM satellite radio.

Alekna is passionately interested in the piano music by the 20th Century Lithuanian avant-garde composers Vytautas Bacevičius and Jeronimas Kačinskas and has released albums of works by both composers. Alekna has given solo recitals in New York, Washington D.C., Geneva, Vienna, Greenwich, and in Lithuania and Belarus. Alekna's other engagements have included a recital tour of ten U.S. and Canadian cities in celebration of the 100th year anniversary of M. K. Čiurlionis, and performances at numerous festivals and collaborations with well-known artists.

In 2019, Alekna joined piano faculty at Brooklyn College of City University of New York. In 2011-2016, he was a Visiting Associate Professor at the Music Academy of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, and in 2013 has co-founded the Birštonas Summer Arts Academy (Lithuania).



GABRIELIUS ALEKNA

Founded in 1960 by Prof. Saulius Sondeckis (Artistic Director and Chief Conductor, 1960–2004) the **Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra** (LCO) is recognised as one of the finest and most internationally acclaimed Lithuanian orchestras. Over the years its tour itineraries have covered the length and breadth of Europe, reached both Americas, Africa, Arabic countries, Australia, China and Japan. The LCO has appeared at major European halls such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna's Musikverein, London's Royal Festival Hall, Rome's Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Salle Pleyel and Gaveau in Paris, Leipzig's Gewandhaus to name a few.

From 1992 to his death in 1999, Yehudi Menuhin conducted almost 60 concerts on the Orchestra's annual tours. Some of these performances were also committed to disc. A great number of distinguished soloists have joined the Orchestra in concerts, including violinists Gidon Kremer, Gil Shaham, Daniel Hope, Julian Rachlin, Vadim Repin, Janine Jansen, Mstislav Rostropovich, Natalia Gutman, David Geringas, Mischa Maisky, Yuri Bashmet, Maxim Rysanov; Evgeny Kissin, Alexei Lubimov, Barry Douglas, Denis Matsuyev, and many others.

During the five decades the LCO has also produced over 100 albums of diverse repertoire, with special attention to the music of Bach and Mozart. The latter's output occupies a special place in the LCO's repertoire: among others, the Orchestra has recorded his complete symphonies. The unique recording of Beethoven's *The Creatures of Prometheus* with Sir Peter Ustinov and conducted by Karl Anton Rickenbacher was released on RCA Red Seal label, becoming a bestseller. Other album releases include transcriptions of concerti by Hummel, Mozart, Weber and Saint-Saëns (Teldec Classics, 2002) and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* released by Deutsche Grammophon in 2016. Along with performances of Baroque and classical masterpieces, the Orchestra has frequently included contemporary opuses in its programmes and recordings. It has always been an active promoter of Lithuanian music, having performed works by Lithuanian composers.

In recent years the LCO has appeared in Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland, Slovenia, Poland, China, Costa Rica, Italy and Lebanon. In 2018, the Orchestra presented a gala concert together with pianist Mūza Rubackytė and conductor Robertas Šervenikas at the Gaveau Hall in Paris.

"The Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra is like the finest quality instrument, having the distinctive sound and traditions of performance. I rank this Orchestra among the leaders of the genre. Sixty years is a long history. Not so many orchestras in Europe can pride themselves on such glorious past," says violinist SERGEY KRYLOV who has been appointed the Music Director of the LCO in December 2008. Sergej Krylov loves assuming the dual role of soloist and conductor in a wide repertoire ranging from Baroque to contemporary music. Major engagements of LCO and Krylov in 2018–2020 included important performances at MUPA concert hall in Budapest, Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory Grand Hall, international festivals and concert halls in China, Italy, Poland, France, Switzerland and Lithuania.

The **Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra** (LNSO) has been active for more than seven decades. The leadership of The Vilnius City Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1940, was entrusted to the famous composer and conductor Balys Dvarionas. In 1964, a new stage started with the young conductor Juozas Domarkas, who took his place at the orchestra's podium. After the restoration of Lithuania's independence, in 1990 the Orchestra was given the name and status of the National Symphony Orchestra.

The Orchestra prepares and performs symphonic music programs not only in the National Philharmonic, but also in various Lithuanian cities. For many years it has carried on with the Palanga Summer Concert Series, the Michał Ogiński International Music Festival in Plungė, as well as representing Lithuanian culture abroad: concerts were given in prestigious halls in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Minsk, Madrid, Berlin, Bern, Antwerp and Stockholm, major cities in Great Britain, France, and particularly a great number of concerts have taken the Orchestra to neighboring Poland. The Orchestra has also appeared in the Schleswig-Holstein Festival in Germany, Prague Spring in the Czech Republic, Musica Romantica in Switzerland and other famous European music festivals and concert halls, such as the Musikverein in Vienna, London's Barbican Centre, Cologne Philharmonic, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, the Moscow Conservatory Great Hall and Suntory Hall in Tokyo. In 2013, for the first time the Orchestra toured in South America (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador), performed in the ceremonial opening and closing of the Lithuanian Presidency of the European Council in Klara Festival (Brussels) and Białystok Philharmonic in Poland. In 2018, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Restoration of the Independence of Lithuania, the LNSO performed with the Warsaw

Philharmonic and the Berlin Konzerthaus under the baton of Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla and the Baltic Sea Festival in Stockholm with the Swedish Radio Choir where an ambitious contemporary program was conducted by Giedrė Šlekytė.

The LNSO has accumulated an extensive, colorful and significant repertoire, embracing works of the oratorio genre and symphonic opuses of the past epochs as well as modern contemporary music with the works by Lithuanian composers occupying an important place. Since 1991, the Orchestra has been a regular participant of the Contemporary Music Festival Gaida, annually presenting premieres by Lithuanian composers. It could be claimed that almost all the symphonic works by Lithuanian composers have been premiered by the LNSO, many of them are dedicated to maestro Juozas Domarkas. Thanks to the maestro, a large part of the Lithuanian music today is being performed not only in the concerts but also from many recordings released in Lithuania and abroad.

Playing around 50 annual concerts, the LNSO nurtures unique traditions significantly contributing to fostering of the high music culture, encouraging the artistic ambitions of young Lithuanian composers and performers, indulging the audience with both large-scale opuses certifying the Orchestra's maturity, as well as symphonic miniatures prompting the imagination of the listeners.

One of the leading Lithuanian conductors MODESTAS PITRĖNAS has taken the duties of the Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the LNSO in of 2015. In 2009–2014, he has served as the principal conductor of the Latvian National Opera (LNO). In 2006–2011, he was the principal conductor of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra. Since August 2018, the maestro also serves as Principal Conductor of the St. Gallen Opera Theatre and symphony orchestra (Switzerland).

filharmonija.lt

Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, **Giedrė Šlekytė** began her musical education at the National Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis School of the Arts in Vilnius. She went on to study conducting at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, the Academy of Music and Theatre in Leipzig and the Zurich University of Arts.

Internationally sought after as a guest conductor, Giedrė Šlekytė has already worked with Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Bruckner Orchester Linz, Staatskapelle Dresden, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra, Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Filarmonica del Teatro Comunale di Bologna, MDR-Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg.

After her engagement as 1st Kapellmeister at Stadttheater Klagenfurt 2016-18 Giedrė Šlekytė conducted opera productions in Leipzig, Zurich, Antwerp and at the Salzburg Festival. In 2020/21 she received invitations for new productions and revivals from the Frankfurt Opera (*Carmen*, *Dialogues des Carmélites*), the Staatsoper Stuttgart (*Le nozze di Figaro*), the Opernhaus Zürich (*Werther*) and the Opera Ballet Vlaanderen (*Werther* – concertante).

Symphonic engagements and re-invitations are leading her currently to performances with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre symphonique de Québec, among others. In autumn 2019, Deutsche Grammophon released the portrait album Raminta Šerkšnytė with Giedrė Šlekytė conducting the oratorio *Songs of Sunset and Dawn* and the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra. Giedrė Šlekytė is a prize winner of the International Malko Competition for Young Conductor in Copenhagen and received the 2nd prize at the International Conducting Competition Solon Michaelides in 2013 in Cyprus (1st prize not awarded). In March 2015, she was nominated for the Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award and in 2018 as "Newcomer of the year" at the International Opera Awards.

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GIETRĖ SLEKYTE



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