



ONDINE

JURGIŠ KARNAVIČIUS

String Quartets Nos. 3 & 4

Vilnius String Quartet



JURGIS KARNAVIČIUS

JURGIS KARNAVIČIUS (1884–1941)

	String Quartet No. 3, Op. 10 (1922)	33:13
I.	Andante	8:00
2	II. Allegro	11:41
3	III. Lento tranquillo	13:32
	String Quartet No. 4 (1925)	28:43
4	I. Moderato commodo	11:12
5	II. Andante	8:04
6	III. Allegro animato	9:27

World première recordings

VILNIUS STRING QUARTET

DALIA KUZNECOVAITĖ, 1st violin

ARTŪRAS ŠILALĖ, 2nd violin

KRISTINA ANUSEVIČIŪTĖ, viola

DEIVIDAS DUMČIUS, cello

Epoch-unveiling music

This album revives Jurgis Karnavičius' (1884–1941) chamber music after many years of oblivion. It features the last 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, but 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. Peterburg 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.

The Third and Fourth string quartets were composed and performed in 1922 and 1925 in St. Petersburg (which at that time was already Petrograd, and since 1924 – Leningrad). The Third String Quartet in D major was dedicated to the memory of Antonio Stradivari. The work is in three movements (1st mvt. *Andante*, 2nd mvt. *Allegro*, 3rd mvt. *Lento, tranquillo*). According to musicologist Inga Jasinskaitė-Jankauskienė, an unconventional approach to the genre is showcased in every parameter – tonal musical language, choice of themes, equality of voices, musical form. Jasinskaitė-Jankauskienė also points out that a slightly simpler third movement could have been composed earlier.

The first publication of the Third String Quartet appeared as late as 1969 (the state publishing house *Vaga*). Then it was premiered by the Lithuanian Quartet, which no longer exists. Unfortunately, another half-century of oblivion followed, until the Vilnius String Quartet resurrected the opus in 2020.

Both the Third and Fourth string quartets are characterized by an anxious, chromatically saturated tonal musical fabric inherited from late romanticism, but the Third Quartet is relatively brighter, still retaining traces of classical musical narration.

The Fourth String Quartet in F Major is also in three movements. Jasinskaitė-Jankauskienė describes the work as music of highly polyphonic development of thematic material in all three movements. Its arrival is framed by two dates: in the manuscript the composer wrote down December 4, 1924 on the opening page of the first movement *Allegro moderato commodo* as a reference to the beginning of composition process and March 19, 1925 at the end of the third movement. Therefore, the Fourth String Quartet was composed in less than four months. The first movement was completed just before the New Year – on December 30, 1924, and the second movement *Andante* – on January 24, 1925.

The first movement *Allegro moderato commodo* sets a disconcerting tone for the whole work: the intonations of gloomily impetuous and intermittent motifs give neither rest to the mind nor Schubertian repose. But they lead to the Tristanian melancholy in the second movement. The movement begins with the cello's yearning recitative, the vertical harmony of which is filled by the remaining instruments. Cello's soliloquy directs the listener's thoughts towards the intonations and spiritual temperature of Wagner's Tristan chord. Indeed, this is one of the most exquisite *belle époque* pages in Karnavičius' oeuvre. The third movement enthrals with Scriabinesque swiftness and

ecstasy: the melodic line with short, chopped motifs, as if chased, flies up until unexpectedly stumbles upon the final cadence. It would seem, that one would still wish for a *post scriptum*, the classical fourth movement, but the listeners have to accept the composer's frugal position and fill in the ellipsis in their minds.

The Fourth String Quartet was performed by the Čiurlionis Quartet in Lithuania in the 1980s, but the score of the work was never published. Therefore, the Vilnius String Quartet performs from the composer's manuscript in this recording.

The Third and Fourth string quartets were premiered by Alexander Glazunov String Quartet in concerts at the Leningrad Philharmonic and the Association of Chamber Music Friends. Also, the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra premiered Karnavičius' symphonic poems *Ulalume* and the *Oval Portrait*.

The Leningrad Contemporary Music Association cooperated closely with the Philharmonic, which regularly hosted the Association's public concerts in the Grand and Chamber concert halls. The concerts featured works by its members, as well as by the younger or older generation composers (not necessarily only Russians) including Scriabin, Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Hindemith. The works were performed by such performers as Maria Yudina, who participated in the performance of Karnavičius' chamber concerto *Love*

after the text of E. A. Poe, Vladimir Sofronitsky and others. In 1926, Dmitry Shostakovich's First Symphony was premiered in the Association's symphonic concert. According to Shostakovich, it was Karnavičius, the chairman of the Association, whom Shostakovich met at the conservatory during his study years, who urged Shostakovich to present new works in auditions as soon as possible.

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)

DEIVIDAS DUMČIUS (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.

Publisher: Vilnius: Vaga, 1969 (String Quartet No. 3); M/s (String Quartet No. 4)

Recordings: Lithuanian National Philharmonic, 24–27 November, 2020

Executive Producer: Reijo Kiilunen

Recording Producers: Aleksandra Kerienė & Vilius Keras

Recording Engineers: Vilius Keras & Evelina Staniulytė

Mastering: Vilius Keras

Baltic Mobile Recordings | www.bmr.lt

© & © 2021 Ondine Oy, Helsinki

Booklet Editor: Joel Valkila

Artist photo: Dmitrijus Matvejevas

Composer photo: Courtesy of the Music Information Centre Lithuania

Cover: Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911):

Laiveliai (Sailing Boats), 1906 | Alamy

ALSO AVAILABLE



ODE 1351-2

For more information please visit www.ondine.net



VILNIUS STRING QUARTET

JURGIŠ KARNAVIČIUS (1884–1941)

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1–3 | String Quartet No. 3, Op. 10 (1922) | 33:13 |
| 4–6 | String Quartet No. 4 (1925) | 28:43 |

VILNIUS STRING QUARTET

DALIA KUZNECOVAITĖ, 1st violin • ARTŪRAS ŠILALĖ, 2nd violin
KRISTINA ANUSEVIČIŪTĖ, viola • DEIVIDAS DUMČIUS, cello



LITHUANIAN NATIONAL
PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY

MINISTRY
OF CULTURE OF
THE REPUBLIC
OF LITHUANIA

