

NAXOS



**Osvaldas
BALAKAUSKAS**

**Symphonies
Nos. 4 and 5**

**Lithuanian National
Symphony Orchestra
Juozas Domarkas**

Osvaldas Balakauskas (b. 1937)

Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5

Osvaldas Balakauskas, one of the leading Lithuanian composers, graduated from the Vilnius Pedagogical Institute in 1961, and from Boris Lyatoshinsky's composition class at the Kiev Conservatory in 1969. From 1992 to 1994 he was ambassador of Lithuania, the first after fifty years of foreign rule, to France, Spain, and Portugal. In 1996 Balakauskas was honoured with the Lithuanian National Award, the highest artistic and cultural distinction in Lithuania. He is head of the Composition Department of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Balakauskas is one of the very few Lithuanian composers who have developed their own unique and precise compositional system. The composer named his technique "dodecatonic": it can be defined as the formation and elaboration of new tonal connection within strict serial structures, along with no less strictly calculated rhythm progressions. Nevertheless, Balakauskas is always able to infuse a certain recognizable stylistic flavour into his mathematically built constructions, which could sound as similar to neoromantic or impressionist music, as to jazz. The synergy of intellect and elegance is what distinguishes his work, as well as steadfast adherence to his own rules of composition, a virtue of being an enthusiastic modernist in the times of ubiquitous post-modernism.

The large list of Balakauskas' compositions is dominated by instrumental genres, chamber ensembles, symphonies, concertos. Symphonic works comprise one of the most important parts of his output, and reveal the composer as a master of instrumentation, skilfully exposing and combining radiant colours of different orchestral groups, emphasizing the individuality and charm of sound of solo instruments. The highlights of Balakauskas's symphonic music include *Sonata of the Mountains*, inspired by the art of Lithuania's greatest

classical composer and painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1975); his quasi-minimalist *Symphony No. 2*, brimming with vigorous rhythms and sparkling colours (1979); *Opera Strumentale* (1987), an abstract orchestral theatre, with evocative instrumental "arias", "duets" and "choruses"; also the *Symphonies No. 4* (1998) and *No. 5* (2001), included on this disc. The latter two represent the new direction in Balakauskas's oeuvre; the turning-point was marked by his *Requiem in memoriam Stasys Lozoraitis*, composed in 1995 [Naxos 8.557604].

Symphony No. 4 was written on the occasion of the start of the new symphonic music season at the Lithuanian National Philharmonic Hall. The titles of its three movements, *Octa*, *Heneca*, *Deca*, correspond to the composer's invented scales of eight, eleven, and ten tones respectively, which underlie the harmonic material for each movement. It is in fact the harmonic progressions determined by the use of specific scales which often function as melodies or motifs in Balakauskas's music, underpinning the entire musical fabric. As said before, this symphony reflects some trends of the composer's recent creative period, a growing transparency of textures, a neo-classical restraint of expression, a balance of form and emotion. Within his system of scales, the composer now strives to develop a euphonic, consonant sound, as if reverting to the origins and traditions of European music, "to something familiar and recognisable". Among other things, this work also displays discernible signs of jazz, a flexible syncopated rhythm, flowing blues harmonies. Various elements of early and modern music settle smoothly into the homogenous and integral composer's musical vocabulary.

Linus Paulauskis

Symphony No. 5 was composed to a commission from the Vilnius Festival. The structure of this four-movement cyclic work is not so typical of Balakauskas: when listening to this music, it seems that the one and the same “theme” is sounding throughout all movements. A half-hour filled with rather intensive music, it evokes a view of really giant painted canvases, those which need dedicated buildings for their proper exhibition. An allusion to painting is not coincidental here: the music is indeed colourful and vital, like four works of art on the same subject, painted in thick and expressive strokes. Despite the energetic rhythms and almost big-band-like outbursts at the culminating points (as well as the absolutely unpredictable form of the composition), all textures are minutely detailed.

The musical material follows its course upwards and downwards persistently and consistently, somewhat resembling the models of Hindu raga or Indonesian gamelan. Such a type of structural enclosure seems rather unexpected, but at the same time, it is probably the most important factor in the originality of this composition. This kind of structural organization was always favoured by Balakauskas; on the other hand, a shift to the “minor” end in the scale of his modal vocabulary, and an increasing amount of dissonances in the harmonic content, seems to predict new vistas in the composer’s creative work.

Šarūnas Nakas

Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra



Founded in 1940 by the Lithuanian composer, conductor and pianist Balys Dvarionas, the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra is by far one of the oldest and most reputable symphony orchestras in Lithuania. In operation for more than six decades, it has played an indispensable rôle in Lithuanian musical life and development of national culture. With 96 players drawn from among Lithuania’s finest musicians the orchestra plays around fifty concerts annually throughout the country, most of them in the Great Hall of the Lithuanian National Philharmonic Society in Vilnius, the home of the orchestra since its inception. Giving from seven to fifteen concerts during international tours each year, the orchestra has performed in most European countries and in Japan, appearing in some of the world’s greatest concert halls and major festivals, including the Musikverein, Vienna, the Alte Oper, Frankfurt, London’s Barbican Centre, Tokyo Metropolitan Space, the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, Stars of Moscow, Russian Winter, Warsaw Autumn, Prague Spring, Ludwigsburg Festival, and many others. The Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the orchestra is Juozas Domarkas, who took up his position in 1964. Other regular conductors with the orchestra include Robertas Šervenikas, who became Assistant Conductor in 1997 and Conductor in 2000, and Modestas Pitrenas who joined the staff as an Assistant Conductor in 2004. The orchestra’s repertoire ranges from classical and romantic masterpieces to the most innovative twentieth-century scores and world premières of nearly all the symphonic works written by Lithuanian composers. There has also been collaboration with leading conductors and soloists from the international arena.

Juozas Domarkas



Juozas Domarkas was appointed the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor with the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra in 1964, while still studying opera and orchestral conducting with Ilya Musin at the St Petersburg Conservatory, from which he graduated in 1965. In 1963, he also had a chance to refine his conducting skills with the charismatic French conductor Igor Markevitch during his master-classes in Moscow. From early on in his career as a leader of the symphony orchestra, Juozas Domarkas has pursued a vision of creating an orchestra of the highest artistic standard. Today he is regarded as a true founder of the LNSO, which is widely known for its stylistic versatility and fine quality of orchestral sound. Extensive tours have repeatedly taken him with his orchestra to major music festivals and concert venues throughout Europe and to Japan and Korea. Lauded by the critics for his bright and emotional manner of performing which paradoxically combines with his fondness for monumentality, he is regularly invited to give guest performances with the major orchestras in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. His extensive repertoire currently includes well over a hundred compositions by Lithuanian composers, most of which resulted from their close cooperation with the conductor. Juozas Domarkas has always been concerned with the nurturing of emerging talent, and for almost three decades he has organized the *Aižalynas Young Performers' Festival*, which provided young pupils and students with a possibility to perform at the National Philharmonic Hall with an experienced orchestra under his

baton, thus triggering many successful careers. He is also an influential figure in the education of young conductors as Professor and Head of the Department of Conducting at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. He has served as a member of the jury at the Fitelberg (1991, 1995) and Prokofiev (1993, 1996) international competitions for conductors. His accomplishments in the cultivation of Lithuanian musical culture have earned him the Grand Cross of the Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas (1998) and the Lithuanian National Award (2000).

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Osvaldas Balakauskas is one of the leaders of the modern school of Lithuanian composition. His symphonies are among his most important, inventive and refined works, skilfully combining the colours of different orchestral groups, while emphasizing the individuality and sound of solo instruments. *Symphony No. 4* includes elements of early and modern music, as well as the syncopated rhythms of jazz. The four movements of *Symphony No. 5* are linked by a common musical theme, and are full of colour, energy, and big-band-like outbursts. Balakauskas' 1995 *Requiem* is available on Naxos 8.557604.

Osvaldas
BALAKAUSKAS
(b. 1937)

Symphony No. 4 (1998)

- | | | |
|---|---------|-------|
| 1 | Octa | 12:35 |
| 2 | Hendeca | 7:54 |
| 3 | Deca | 12:33 |

Symphony No. 5 (2001)

- | | | |
|---|------------------|------|
| 4 | I | 7:47 |
| 5 | II* | 9:16 |
| 6 | III [†] | 7:26 |
| 7 | IV | 5:44 |

Romualdas Staškus, Oboe[†] • Igor Kramarev, Trumpet*
Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra • Juozas Domarkas

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