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NAXOS

Mikalojus Konstantinas
ČIURLIONIS

On the Harp Strings

Preludes • Nocturnes

I Sowed the Rue

Performed and arranged for harp by

Joana Daunytė

Mikalojus Konstantinas
ČIURLIONIS
(1875–1911)

On the Harp Strings

1	Prelude in F sharp major 'Viešpaties Angelas (Angelus Domini)', VL 184 (1901)	3:13
2	Nocturne No. 2 in C sharp minor, VL 183 (1901)	4:39
3	Prelude in F major–A minor, VL 188 (1901)	2:33
4	Dedication in B flat major, VL 169 (1899)	3:20
5	Elegy in D minor, VL 191 (1901)	3:24
6	Mazurka in B minor, VL 234 (1902)	2:00
7	Sėjau rūtą (I Sowed the Rue), VL 179 (1900)	3:04
8	Nocturne No. 1 in F sharp minor, VL 178 (1900)	3:53
9	Pastoral in D flat major, VL 187 (1901)	1:51
10	Humoresque in G minor, VL 162 (1899)	3:48
11	Prelude in D flat major, VL 253 (1904)	2:37
12	Impromptu in F sharp minor, VL 181 (1900)	5:31
13	Lullaby in G major, VL 242 (1903)	4:36
14	Prelude in D major, VL 305 (1906)	1:25
15	Moment musical in A major, VL 246 (1903)	2:04
16	Prelude in B major, VL 186 (1901)	2:39

Recorded: 8 February 2018 1–6 8 16, 26 June 2018 7 9–15
at Studio Residence Paliesius, Paliesius Manor, Ignalina, Lithuania

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911)

On the Harp Strings

The works of composer and artist Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) form the basis of the Lithuanian cultural identity. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Čiurlionis was one of the founding figures in the Lithuanian national cultural renaissance, and his musical compositions and visionary paintings remain among the greatest gems in the treasure chest of Lithuanian culture. His symphonic poems *Miške* ('In the Forest') and *Jūra* ('The Sea') are the most frequently performed Lithuanian symphonic works internationally. His choral and piano adaptations of Lithuanian folk songs, coupled with his continual search for new expressive means, formed the framework for the Lithuanian national school of composition, while his paintings continue to be the source of admiration and a benchmark for aspiring Lithuanian visual artists. Indeed, his revolutionary time- and space-defying artworks, in which he merged principles of music and visual art, remain to this day Lithuania's most significant contribution to the golden fund of European civilisation.

The catalogue of Čiurlionis's compositions compiled by musicologist Vytautas Landsbergis (VL) in 1971 contains 345 entries. It includes symphonies, choral works, chamber works, songs and opuses for organ and piano. Piano music occupies more than two thirds of the catalogue. Čiurlionis's earliest works were his piano preludes, mazurkas and canons, dating from 1896, while the last completed work listed in the catalogue is his great *Fugue in B flat minor, VL 345*, finished in November 1909. Miniatures dominate the list of piano works, but there are also several sets of variations and two sonatas, of which only the second has survived.

This recording features 16 piano miniatures arranged for solo harp by Joana Daunytė. Čiurlionis did not write any works for solo harp, but the instrument is employed in a very sensitive and picturesque way in both of his symphonic poems. In *The Sea*, the harp introduces the main subject and signals its return, and the same instrument announces an atmospheric passageway into the world of the fantastic fairy tale of *In the Forest*. In his paintings, Čiurlionis used the image of the harp with great poetic and metaphoric significance: in one of his earliest works, *The Rustle of the Forest*, the wind, in the shape of a hand, is stroking the trunks of some trees that form the shape of a harp. A row of harps is beautifully depicted in the eleventh painting of his *Creation of the World* cycle, as well as in his triptych *The Hymn*. In every instance, the harp is representing a pathway into the sacred world of spirituality and dream.

The idea to adapt Čiurlionis's piano miniatures for harp is a novel one, and this recording clearly demonstrates its validity. The instrument, in a very organic way, encompasses many characteristics identifiable with the aesthetic values and ambitions of the artist. Both the paintings and the music of Čiurlionis exhibit transparent, thinly layered texture, subtlety of colour, emotional nuance, intimacy of expression, tranquillity of pace and a predominant serenity of mood. All these aspects are naturally associated with the sound-world of the harp.

The selection of miniatures chronologically form three distinct groups. Six of them [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [5](#) [9](#) [16](#) were composed during the summer of 1901 in the southern mineral spring town of Druskininkai, Čiurlionis's beloved childhood town. After completing his music studies in Warsaw, Čiurlionis had continued his education in Leipzig, where he submerged himself in European culture and became actively involved in painting. The summer in Druskininkai was a rare period in which he viewed himself as solely a composer, and the six miniatures offer a poetic mood full of expectation, tranquillity, and harmony with nature.

Five miniatures [4](#) [7](#) [8](#) [10](#) [12](#) were composed during Čiurlionis's years studying music in Warsaw. They represent the composer as aspiring Romanticist. Among them is one marked with a dedication to Maria Morawska, Čiurlionis first love [4](#); an arrangement of a Lithuanian folk song [7](#); his first published composition as a young composer [8](#); a lovely, intimate Humoresque [10](#); and an ambitious Impromptu [12](#), that last of which poignantly exhibits the textural, technical and dramatic possibilities of the harp.

The remaining five miniatures [6](#) [11](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) correspond with the years when Čiurlionis was actively pursuing both visual and musical creative realms. All of them showcase the composer's growing maturity and individuality.

The 16 works encompass Čiurlionis's creative and spiritual universe as an artist. The spacious and transparent textures, the subtlety of the dynamics, and the emotional nuances sound so organic that it is easy to imagine that they were composed for the harp.

Rokas Zubovas

Great-grandson of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis

The World That is Very Much Like a Fairy Tale

A personal note on Čiurlionis by Professor Vytautis Landsbergis

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis communicated his creative message equally through his music and in his paintings, which carry within themselves the very essence of music.

He heard this music in the ether, captured it and wrote it down. It rises, lifting us up on its wings and flying far off.

Where to?

Towards its one and only destination: a different world.

And Čiurlionis's paintings, just like his poetry, are a rich collection of indications of how we should undertake this journey to that transformed world.

His life encountered a fragile flower, barely revealing its petals upon first bloom. Her name was Halina. He wrote fantasy-filled letters to her, as if she were herself an enchanted Caucasian or Carpathian Mountain, which speaks to a wanderer already from afar with its glacial diamonds and the gold that is born out of the embrace of all possible sunsets.

'My dearest Golden Girl: do not be afraid of anything', he wrote.

'We were terribly busy, trying to cut a wild strawberry into two equal halves.

'And then I remembered that once upon a time the whole world was very much like a fairy tale. The sun was shining a hundred times brighter, the silver forests of glistening walnuts were rising high on the shores of sleepy emerald lakes, and through the golden-scaled horsetails that seemed proudly to support the sky there flew a terrifying pterodactyl. It flew wildly, loudly, so astounding and flaming with danger. And then it disappeared into the radiating mists of twelve rainbows, which forever hover above the Silent Ocean. You do remember those times, my little darling? You remember, don't you? Oh, without a shadow of a doubt. Do not deny it. I can see it in your dear eyes, my tiny little Mount Kazbek.'

In the world of music, the symbolism of the harp is unique. The instrument can be found from the earliest times when the resonance of a string was found to create pleasing sounds. Hearing Čiurlionis's music recorded by Joana Daunytė, I understand these ancient connections. In Čiurlionis's paintings one can sometimes perceive a silhouette, the slight contour of a harp, timidly emerging out of the shapes of nature. Such signs tell us: everything is music. On this recording, we are offered the possibility of hearing it.

The harp offers a different kind of tension, distance, mystic meaning. These versions are not transcriptions, but rather a change of state of being, a trancelike reliving. Even when primeval beings, hairy and clothed in fur, were searching for the meaning of existence, they reached for these shadowy harps. As a traveller makes his way above the abyss, the gentle resonance of a harp whispers amid fantastical plants.

And that is what there is.

Vytautas Landsbergis

Edited by Christopher Lyndon-Gee

Translated from Lithuanian to English by Jadvyga Krūminienė

Revised by Laura Karnavičiūtė

A note from the harpist

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis is a composer who has fascinated me from my early school years. Aside from his cultural legacy in music and art as the creator of around 300 paintings and graphic works and around 400 pieces of music, I was impressed by his profoundly spiritual personality and his love for his motherland, its culture and folk music. Thanks to my father, who was a writer involved in diverse social activities devoted to the cultural and intellectual development of the people of his country, I am proud of my Lithuanian roots and of traditional Lithuanian music.

Čiurlionis's music captivates with its emotional intensity, descriptions of nature and the illuminating fairy-tale elements within it. But those major works were composed for the piano. My dream was to find some pieces written for the harp, but in Lithuania the practice of studying and playing the harp began some decades after the composer's death. Yet, knowing the profound spirit of Čiurlionis from the reminiscences of his contemporaries, I am sure that had he encountered the harp as a remarkable solo instrument, we would now have various opuses written specifically for it.

My musical intuition prompted me to make harp arrangements of Čiurlionis's early piano music as an affectionate tribute to the memory of this great Lithuanian artist. My contribution would also expand the repertoire of Lithuanian harp music and thus allow Čiurlionis to enter an entirely new form of musical performance. I had an invaluable experience when approaching the composer's piano music, which I did with deep respect. My intention was to shed new light on these works using Čiurlionis's words as my guide:

'But one should carry the light with oneself, coming from within, to be able to shine in darkness to all who are standing on the road that seeing it they could find light in themselves and go their own way, that they would not stand in the dark as if not knowing where to go, because such people are easily carried away by the tempest, and they do not see the light, which, after the storm, comes back in new freshness and beauty. Light before the tempest, the storm, light after the tempest – and so it is from the very beginning of the world.'

Joana Daunytė

Translated from Lithuanian to English by Jadvyga Krūminienė

Joana Daunytė



Joana Daunytė is a distinguished harpist performing solo and chamber music. A prize winner at several international competitions, she has performed in Europe, Russia and the US. She is a member of the ensemble Regnum Musicale and has appeared with Lithuanian ensembles including the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, St Christopher Chamber Orchestra, the Kaunas Quartet, Vilnius String Quartet, and Jauna Muzika chamber choir. Daunytė studied at the conservatories of Geneva and Amsterdam and the Norwegian Academy of Music. She continued her training at the Villecroze Music Academy in France. From 2005 to 2008 she was a beneficiary of the Rostropovich Fund. She has been recognised for her achievements in music by Valdas Adamkus and Dalia Grybauskaitė, former presidents of Lithuania, and by the government of Lithuania. Daunytė teaches harp performance at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, where she is also writing a PhD paper in harp repertoire.

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis was Lithuania's leading composer at the turn of the 20th century as well as an internationally admired artist. The piano scores from which these pieces are transcribed are Romantic in expression, influenced by the beauty of his country's landscape and its folklore. With this selection of works, Joana Daunytė has expanded the repertoire of Lithuanian harp works, presenting a new perspective on the music's national flavour.



Mikalojus Konstantinas
ČIURLIONIS
(1875–1911)



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2 Nocturne No. 2 in C sharp minor (1901)	4:39	9 Pastoral in D flat major (1901)	1:51
3 Prelude in F major–A minor (1901)	2:33	10 Humoresque in G minor (1899)	3:48
4 Dedication in B flat major (1899)	3:20	11 Prelude in D flat major (1904)	2:37
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6 Mazurka in B minor (1902)	2:00	13 Lullaby in G major (1903)	4:36
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		16 Prelude in B major (1901)	2:39

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All arrangements by
Joana Daunytė, Harp



A detailed track list and full recording details can be found inside the booklet.
Executive producer: Laurynas Preikša • Producers: Vilius Keras, Aleksandra Kerienė
Engineer: Vilius Keras • Booklet notes: Rokas Zubovas, Vytautas Landsbergis, Joana Daunytė
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