

Vytautas BACEVIČIUS

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

POÈME CONTEMPLATION, OP. 5

POÈME COSMIQUE, OP. 65

POÈME MYSTIQUE, OP. 6

CHANSON TRISTE, OP. 56

THREE MOMENTS, OP. 41

POÈME NO. 5, OP. 42

SUITE NO. 3, OP. 60

SUITE NO. 1, OP. 47

VISION, OP. 30

Gabrielius Alekna

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDING

VYTAUTAS BACEVIČIUS, LITHUANIAN RADICAL

by Šarūnas Nakas

During his lifetime the name of Vytautas Bacevičius (1905–70) was almost unknown, and few of his major works were published or performed, but he is now considered to have been the foremost figure in Lithuanian music of the mid-twentieth century. He built his reputation as a modern composer in the decades preceding the Second World War, also pursuing an international career as a virtuoso pianist by appearing as recitalist and soloist with the leading orchestras in major venues in Europe, South America and later in the United States. His emergence into the musical life of the time was as a visionary, trendsetter and promoter of modern urban ideology, ardently defending his views against public criticism.

Bacevičius was born in Łódź, in central Poland, into a family of joint Polish-Lithuanian origin. Vytautas was the only sibling to identify himself as Lithuanian, even though the father taught his two sons and two daughters Lithuanian and often took them to spend the summers in his homeland.¹ The best-known member of the family was Vytautas' younger sister Gražyna Bacewicz (1909–69), who remained in Poland to achieve prominence as one of the most gifted Polish violinists and female composers.

After graduating from the private conservatoire in Łódź in 1926, Bacevičius moved to Kaunas, the inter-War capital of Lithuania, where he studied philosophy and aesthetics at the Vytautas Magnus University. In 1927 a state scholarship enabled him to pursue his education in Paris, where he studied piano with Santiago Riéra, composition with Nikolai Tcherepnin at the Russian Conservatoire and philosophy at the Sorbonne. Dividing his time between Kaunas and Paris until 1931, he was part

¹ Vincas Bacevičius, the head of the family, settled in Kaunas in 1923; their mother stayed in Łódź with the other children. Vytautas' brother Kęstutis often said that he considered himself both Polish and Lithuanian. In 1923–25 Kęstutis, too, lived and worked in Kaunas, and Gražyna used to come to perform there every year (information from Ona Narbutienė).

of a Parisian circle of modernist *émigré* composers, also making a name for himself as a concert pianist, with recitals in Berlin, Paris, Prague, Warsaw and elsewhere.

He continued to tour frequently even after having finally resettled in Lithuania (1931–39), where he taught aesthetics and harmony and held a professorship in piano at the Kaunas Conservatoire. He was refused a composition class because of the radical tendencies in his music, which clashed with the conservatism prevalent in the local musical environment, and naturally felt that his work received more serious appreciation abroad. As pianist he was invited to join the distinguished jury of the 1938 Eugène Ysaÿe Competition in Brussels. As co-founder and chair of the Lithuanian Section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, he represented Lithuania at ISCM events in 1938 and 1939.

Bacevičius was on a tour of South America in the summer of 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Lithuania, making him an exile. The following year he moved to New York, where he was detained for lack of valid documents. In autumn 1940, in the months after the occupation of the three Baltic states by the Soviet Union, he was harassed (through threats to his father's life and his own) into accepting Soviet citizenship and issued with a Soviet passport – a forced opportunistic gesture that outraged the Lithuanian community in the USA and deprived him of its support for good. Between 1940 and 1956, he gave eight recitals at Carnegie Hall, which received fairly positive reviews, but were far from being lauded as sensational performances. Since he was blacklisted as a Communist sympathiser during the McCarthy era, he failed in several attempts to obtain US citizenship and was in constant danger of deportation.

Bacevičius, who had a combative personality, bitterly confronted US concert agencies with accusations of conspiracy against him. Such behaviour gradually alienated him from the market that used to provide his income. Although he spent nearly half of his life in exile and had to support himself mainly by teaching, he nonetheless composed eleven orchestral compositions, not one of which was performed in his adoptive country, and he remained almost the only performer of his piano works. He became drawn to occult teachings, yoga and eastern philosophy, and found spiritual nourishment in the books of the American architect and writer Claude Bragdon (1866–1946), which dealt with the

universal origin and meaning of geometric ornaments. Bacevičius developed his own esoteric vision of ‘cosmic music’, to which he dedicated himself wholeheartedly from then on. In 1961 and 1962, when he visited Paris to meet his sisters, Gražyna brought him some books in contemporary music-theory and recordings of the avant-garde and electronic music, which provided the inspiration to ‘update’ his musical language. He contemplated composing a grandiose cycle entitled ‘Nine cosmic symphonic works: Sahasrara Chakra (after Claude Bragdon)’. But declining health encumbered this creative upsurge, and he managed to complete only the opening work in the cycle, *Graphique* (‘A Glimpse into Construction of the Universe’, 1964).² Having written not a single composition since 1966, he sank into poverty and isolation. News that he was finally granted US citizenship in 1967 brought no solace. Vytautas Bacevičius died in New York on 15 January 1970, aged 64.

Bacevičius was primarily a composer of pure instrumental music (although he also wrote a handful of songs for voice and piano and, in 1929, a short opera, *The Priestess*, his Op. 11). For all that his musical tastes were formed in an atmosphere where Chopin reigned supreme, his early works showed more affinity with Alexander Skryabin and owed much to Skryabin’s intricate piano textures, rhythmic effects and serpentine lines, twisting in a flame-like manner. Bacevičius was also no less attracted to the otherworldly themes, esoteric and mystical thought which infused his early piano pieces (*Poème mystique*, 1926; *Poème astral*, 1927) and gained especially powerful expression in his late years (*Poème cosmique*, 1959; *Rayons cosmiques* and *Sixième mot*, 1963; *Graphique*, 1964; *Septième mot*, 1966³). In Paris he became fascinated with the latest tendencies in French music of the time: mechanised motor-rhythms, strident harmonies and vigorous expressivity. His atonal style embraced the influences of urbanised music by Arthur Honegger and George Antheil (*Poème électrique* and ballet *Tourbillon de la Vie*, both 1932) and the ‘barbaric’ style of Sergei Prokofiev (First Piano Concerto, 1929; Second

² Recorded, with the *Poème Électrique*, Piano Concerto No. 1 and Symphonies Nos. 2 and 6, on Toccata Classics TOCC 0049 by the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Vytautas Lukošius and Martynas Šaukus.

³ Bacevičius’ complete *Mots* – five for solo piano, one for organ and one for two pianos (1933–66) – are recorded by Gabrielius Alekna, Ursula Oppens and Matthew Lewis on Toccata Classics TOCC 0134.

Piano Concerto, 1933). As a newcomer to the United States, Bacevičius tried to adapt his language to the more conservative tastes of the American audience and shifted back to a more traditional style. But he grew sceptical of this manoeuvre, later referring to this time as a period of 'compromise'⁴ which did not get him anywhere, since it failed to achieve any performances of his orchestral works.

In the budding era of rocket technology and the Cold War space race, Bacevičius' thoughts were also set on the exploration of space, but his instruments were mental rather than technological. He chose an esoteric path, leading towards 'a new theory for musical creation', where 'music is the key element in the existence of the Universe, a constant product of its vibration, which creates magnetism responsible for keeping the entire Universe in balance.'⁵ It was a concept of abstract music based on geometrical principles, which emphasised parameters of space, rhythm and movement, turning away from passive contemplation and 'material or acoustic exteriority'.⁶ Works written during the period of 'cosmic music', which began around 1960, paralleled the works of Edgard Varèse and Olivier Messiaen of this time and yet also approximated to the ideas of Giacinto Scelsi and Karlheinz Stockhausen in their intent. Bacevičius developed an original method of graphic notation that should have sped up his creative process, but illness intervened before his plans could reach fruition.

Šarūnas Nakas is a Lithuanian composer, essayist, conductor, performance and video artist, organiser of contemporary-music festivals and presenter of radio programmes. In 2007 he was awarded the National Arts and Culture Prize, the highest artistic distinction in Lithuania.

⁴ Letter to Valerija Tysliaviienė, dated 20 February 1963, quoted by Ona Narbutienė, *Vytautas Bacevičius: Gyvenimo partitūra*, Petro ofsetas, Vilnius, 2005, p. 175.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁶ Quoted in Edmundas Gedgaudas, *Vytautas Bacevičius: Išsakyta žodžiais*, Petro ofsetas, Vilnius, 2005, p. 152.

VYTAUTAS BACEVIČIUS: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

by Gabrielius Alekna

This Toccata Classics series was never intended to present the ‘complete piano works’ of Vytautas Bacevičius. Rather, for each of the three volumes, I have selected compositions that demonstrate the enormous variety of his piano-writing, with compositions representing different periods, genres, styles and lengths. I have also prioritised including first recordings, an objective increasingly difficult to achieve, given the growing interest of other pianists in performing and recording Bacevičius’ music. I hope that this approach has allowed each volume to offer a colourful and well-balanced picture of Bacevičius’ music, in this way sharing with the listeners my own sense of discovery.

Vytautas Bacevičius was the first (and for several decades the only) Lithuanian instrumental soloist to achieve international recognition. As he included his own compositions in all his solo programmes and frequently toured with his Piano Concerto No. 1 (*Sur les thèmes lithuaniens*), he was the face of Lithuanian music in the eyes of European audiences in the 1930s. The artistry of his performances and the extent of his concert activities earned him a fine reputation, confirmed by his invitation to serve on a jury at the International Eugène Ysaÿe Piano Competition in Brussels in 1938, alongside such luminaries as François Casadesus, Walter Gieseking, Arthur Rubinstein, Emil Sauer and Leopold Stokowski. Even though he received a traditional conservatoire training in his native Łódź and was proud of being a ‘third generation Chopin pupil’ through his Parisian piano studies with Santiago Riéra, it was Bacevičius’ overarching concern with modernity that made his recital programmes distinctive. They stood out, especially in the 1930s and early 1940s, as decidedly forward-looking, focusing on such twentieth-century composers as Albéniz, Debussy, Falla, Prokofiev, Ravel, Szymanowski, Skryabin and Tcherepnin.

Bacevičius made only one recording, an LP produced in the home of a friend with no access to editing capabilities, and long after he had withdrawn from performing activities. As such, it is not a fair representation of his pianistic style. Instead, contemporary reviews of his concert performances remain the main source for assessing the manner and style of his playing. Besides noting the originality of his programmes, reviewers seemed to agree on several other points. Most of them stressed strong technique, bold temperament and rhythmic precision: Bacevičius 'has technique to spare and fingers of steel';¹ 'a really perfect technique, a strong expression, a great artistic temperament – [Bacevičius] gave proof of all the qualities that make a great pianist';² 'Bacevičius' interpretations breathe with powerful, hypnotising dynamism, and expressiveness of extraordinary force'.³ Many also pointed out his especially convincing interpretations of contemporary music, as illustrated in a response from the French critic Joseph Baruzi: 'compositions of the so-called modernists, the pianist played with full abandon, revealing the full power of his talent'.⁴

While studying, performing and recording Bacevičius' piano music, I am constantly reminded of his impeccable training and that formidable technique. Most of his works are complex and challenging to learn and perform, though at the same time being idiomatic and well laid out for the hands. One of the crucial clues to how Bacevičius intended his compositions to sound is his occasional metronome indications. They are surprisingly fast, even for supposedly slow or moderately paced sections. To me, that indicates the mercurial, constantly shifting and sparkling sound he was aiming at, which fittingly reflects his neurotic, restless and contradictory personality.

The group of piano compositions entitled *Poèmes* occupy a special place in his output: along with his *Mots*, they are his most original compositions. He returned to the genre throughout his creative life and also programmed all of them in his public recitals. (Besides the seven for piano, one of which has a missing ending, he wrote one for organ

¹ 'Program by Bacevicius: Veteran Pianist Performs Own Grand Fantaisie Impromptu', *The New York Times*, 12 March 1951.

² 'Pianisto Vyt. Bacevičiaus koncertas', *Rytas* (Kaunas), 9 December 1929.

³ Joseph Baruzi, recital review, *Le Ménestrel* (Paris), 21 December 1930.

⁴ *Le Ménestrel*, 10 May 1929.

and one, unfinished, for orchestra.) With the first two, *Poème contemplation*, Op. 5, and *Poème mystique*, Op. 6, Bacevičius announced his presence to Kaunas, Lithuania – his newly adopted homeland – after moving there in 1926 from his native Łódź, in Poland. The musical language of these pieces (and of the *Poème astral*, Op. 7⁵) points clearly to the influence of Alexander Skryabin. Though the Theosophy-inflected titles of these works (not otherwise explained by the composer) are possibly signs of an overall influence of a Skryabinesque aesthetic outlook, these seeds evolved during Bacevičius' last creative decade into his firmly held and passionately argued ideas of 'cosmic music'. Both *Poèmes* were published by the Mercury Music Corporation in New York in 1967.

The *Poème contemplation*, Op. 5 (1926) [1], is dedicated to the composer's brother Kęstutis (Kiejstut in Polish). In a letter to the musicologist Milda Kazakevičienė, Bacevičius acknowledged Skryabin's influence and put the two poems in the group of 'pure atonalism', within his period of 'atonal expressionism'.⁶ To be sure, it's not pure atonality. In her work attempting to define subtle types and degrees of tonality lying between the tonal and the atonal in Bacevičius' work, the musicologist Eglė Gudžinskaitė considers *Poème contemplation* an example of 'ambivalent' or 'changeable' tonality.⁷ In his letter to Kazakevičienė, Bacevičius pointed out that the *Poème contemplation* 'has complex and most interesting rhythms', and constant changes of time-signature 'as in Pierre Boulez'. It is indeed filled with intricate rhythms superimposed upon one another, capriciously wrought melodic gestures, double trills, cascades of delicate downward-pointing arpeggios and even single-note tremolos. It is through-composed with some short recapitulatory passages.

The *Poème mystique*, Op. 6 (1926) [2], is dedicated to the composer's sister Wanda. Compared with the *Poème contemplation*, the melodic gestures here are longer and more fully developed and the musical flow more consciously structured, with some sections returning in same or varied form. Dynamics are dramatised, with some sonorous

⁵ Recorded on Toccata Classics TOCC 0328.

⁶ Bacevičius to Milda Kazakevičienė, 1969 (exact date unknown).

⁷ Eglė Gudžinskaitė, 'Tonacinio principo metamorfozės Vytauto Bacevičiaus kūrinuose fortepijonui' ('Metamorphosis of Tonal Principle in Piano Works by Vytautas Bacevičius'), *Lithuanian Musicology*, Vol. 3 (2001), pp. 41–60.

chordal tremolos. In a Skryabinesque vein, many harmonic progressions are built around dominant-seventh chords with added notes. The layering of textures results in notation that is often expanded to three and even four staves.

Vision, Op. 30 (1937) [3], dedicated to his sister Grażyna and published in 1967 by the Mercury Music Corporation, is the shortest stand-alone piece on this album. Harmonies are continuously in flux in smooth chromatic progressions, but the music studiously avoids giving any impression of a tonal centre. In his letter to Kazakevičienė, Bacevičius described the musical language of *Vision* and some other works as ‘synthetic style’, by which he meant ‘the synthesis of various styles – classic-romantic, impressionist and expressionist-atonal – that was quite successfully used by Alban Berg in his opera *Wozzeck*.⁸ A dense beginning, *Andante* – the first of three sections – soon yields to a dark ostinato rhythmic figure, which leads, lower and lower, into the deepest register of the piano. The Skryabinesque *volante* middle section – *Più mosso* – follows with the constantly rising and pulsating left-hand part feeding the right-hand chromatic shifts from parallel fourths to thirds to tritones as the music reaches a short climax of *fortissimo* double octaves. After a return to the dark *Andante* ostinato figures, they are transformed into disquieting dotted rhythms, reiterated as music sinks even deeper until the final dissonance melts away at *ppp*.

The *Three Moments*, Op. 41 (1946), were published in 2006, in my edition;⁹ this is their first recording. Compared to earlier pieces from 1920s and 1930s, this set exemplifies a new era and sensibility, down to its English titles. It is from what Bacevičius saw as a Neo-Classical and Neo-Romantic period of ‘compromise’,¹⁰ as he simplified his musical language in an attempt to conform to conservative American tastes, in his hope of being understood and appreciated by the American public. The three pieces are in lyrical mould, with no percussiveness, with relatively straightforward texture and few changes of metre. Charming harmonic sequences recall Franck or Poulenc, in places

⁸ Bacevičius to Kazakevičienė, 1969.

⁹ *Vytautas Bacevičius: Piano Works: First Edition*, two vols., ed Gabrielius Alekna, Lithuanian Classical Series, Lithuanian Music Information and Publishing Centre, Vilnius, 2006.

¹⁰ Bacevičius to Kazakevičienė, 1969.

even approaching Gershwin. Even the tempo markings suggest the lighter, less serious character of the set: *Allegretto delicamente* (*quasi Andantino*) for 'Hope', *Allegretto* (*quasi Allegro*) for 'Elevation' and *Moderato sostenuto* – *Allegro assai sensibilmente* for 'Splendour'. In this set, Bacevičius extensively uses his signature rearrangement/collage/mosaic technique, whereby short, usually one- or two-bar fragments reappear in different configurations, in either the same or transposed form. It is likely that the inspiration for this kind of constructivism came from his longtime admiration for abstract art. The first, 'Hope' [4], opens with a lilting waltz-like A section in $\frac{6}{8}$, followed by a bouncy chordal *scherzando* B section in $\frac{2}{4}$, and then a modified A section, with collage/mosaic technique used throughout. No. 2, 'Elevation' [5], is in AA₁ form, with the A₁ section largely a shattered and rearranged mosaic of the A section. Ubiquitous short slurs fill the music with dance-like hops and swings. Even the wide dynamic range, *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, fails to disturb the sunny and asymmetrically graceful character of the piece. The closing 'Splendour' [6] starts and ends with an A section in the 'three-hand' texture exploited heavily by Romantic composers – in this case, a double-note tremolo middle layer, played mostly by the right hand, flanked with a bass line and a long soprano cantilena (rare for Bacevičius) – requiring frequent hand-crossings. The more dance-like B section, which is itself in ABA form, is in triple time but uses hemiola so consistently that it sounds more like it is in $\frac{2}{4}$. After the rearranged return of the 'Romantic' tremolo A section, an ecstatic coda ends the piece splendidly indeed.

Poème No. 5, Op. 42 (1946) [7], was published for the first time in 2002 by the Lithuanian Music Information Centre, in an edition by Lina Navickaitė. More than many other Bacevičius works, this one seems to have been written as a virtuoso concert piece intended to showcase his compositional and pianistic gifts, at a time when he still had hopes for a successful concert career in America. And indeed, he performed *Poème* No. 5 on a WNYC radio broadcast in 1947 and then at one of his Carnegie Hall recitals the following year. The piece displays a wide range of characters, from fragile and hesitant *pianissimo* syncopations to a muscular military march. It seems to be in the style that Bacevičius described as 'new modernism' – characterised by angular 'primitivistic' rhythms and proliferation of accents, which he attributed to the influences of Prokofiev

and Stravinsky.¹¹ This rhythmic energy is matched by rich, biting harmonies using seconds and fourths. It is one of his first pieces to widely employ repeated-note figures, something he was to grow fond of using.

The genre of the suite, most readily associated with Baroque dance, was first resurrected by Adolf Jensen (1837–79), whose *Deutsche Suite*, Op. 36, published in Berlin in 1869, re-introduced the spirit of the Baroque into German music. Later composers as varied in their aesthetic outlooks as Stravinsky and Schoenberg adopted it, too, since it allowed them to experiment with the grouping of short musical forms without expectation of their deep integration. This album includes two of Bacevičius' three suites for piano. There is no record of his performing Suite No. 1, Op. 47 (1949), which was published only in 2006, in my edition.¹² Its individual movements are some of the simplest in his output: all of them feature recapitulatory two- or three-part form, with numerous uses of mosaic/collage technique. The Suite, an example of his Neo-Classical, 'compromise' style, nevertheless teams with imaginative, inventive textures and harmonic colours, delightfully conveying a range of moods, from pathos (I. *Moderato pathétique* [8]) via the feverish energy of repeated notes (II. *Allegro energico* [9]) to humour (an especially charming III. *Moderato scherzando (quasi Allegretto)* [10]), from puzzlingly mysterious (IV. *Lento bizzaramente* [11]), to an elegant 'spinning song' (V. *Allegretto leggierramente (quasi Moderato)* [12]).

As with the First Suite, there is no record of Bacevičius having performed his *Chanson triste* (*Liūdna daina* in Lithuanian), Op. 56 (1954) [13], published in my edition in 2006.¹³ True to its title, the piece begins *Andante dolore*, dominated by low, dark chords strung together by double-dotted melodic rhythm. After some rise and fall through *staccato* semiquavers (sixteenths) and then pleading triplets, a highly contrasting *Moderato energico* section brings a jolt of energy, intensified even more by short bursts of leaping *più mosso* triplet passages. After a new element is presented in the original *Andante* tempo, the contrasting *Moderato energico* section resumes, with some of its elements

¹¹ Bacevičius to Kazakevičienė, 1969.

¹² In *Vytautas Bacevičius: Piano Works: First Edition*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

repeated and transposed. The *Andante dolore* then returns, in a rearranged order. The formal structure of the piece – still part of the period of ‘compromise’ – is a simple but creative ABCDCC1BAD.

Bacevičius’ Suite No. 3, Op. 60 (1956) – I. *Allegretto* [14], II. *Allegro moderato* [15], III. *Lento* [16], IV. *Presto* [17] – survived as proofs of an engraved edition from 1969; it was finally published in 2024 by the Lithuanian Music Information Centre. Here, too, there is no record of Bacevičius having performed it. It is a transitional work, showing him moving away from the music of ‘compromise’ towards his highly original late style. Not unlike in his first Suite, he employs mosaic-like (re)organisation of material within recapitulatory-like forms. The harmonies here, however, have been pruned of traditional third-based chords and rely instead on sonorities built out of seconds, fourths, tritones and sevenths. Textures become ‘scattered’, almost pointillistically acrobatic, aerated to a degree of transparency where melody and harmony fuse into one. Its highlights include the breathless waltz-like episodes in the first-movement *Allegretto* and closing *Presto*, and the disconcerting ‘birdcall’ ostinatos of oscillating fourths in the third-movement *Lento*, which closes with a chordal sequence that evokes Messiaen.

The *Poème cosmique*, Op. 65 (1959) [18], was published by the Mercury Music Corporation in 1967 and recorded by Bacevičius on an LP released by the Delta Recording Corporation two years later. With this work he picks up his Skryabin-inspired mystical thread of the early *Poèmes*, but now it is woven very consciously into what he called his ‘cosmic music’, the endeavour to which he would devote his remaining creative years. For him, ‘cosmic’ meant not the external but the inner cosmos of man as the source of all creativity, and ‘cosmic music’ sat at the forefront of musical progress. His late masterpieces – such as *Graphique* and Symphony No. 6, *Cosmique*, for orchestra,¹⁴ Piano Concerto No. 4, *Symphonie concertante*,¹⁵ or the *Septième mot* for two pianos¹⁶ – bear witness to these efforts. The sound of the *Poème cosmique* is the product of sometimes uneasy but nonetheless compelling synthesis of his newly liberated, highly distinctive

¹⁴ Recorded on Vytautas Bacevičius: *Orchestral Music*, Toccata Classics TOCC 0049.

¹⁵ Recorded on Vytautas Bacevičius: *Orchestral Works*, Volume One, Naxos 8.573282.

¹⁶ Recorded on Vytautas Bacevičius: *Piano Music*, Volume One, Toccata Classics TOCC 0134.

late style on one hand and his penchant for brilliant piano writing on the other. Although mosaic/collage technique is used within some sections, gone is recapitulatory form, with music always moving towards something new. In her study of tonality in Bacevičius, Gudžinskaitė maintains that the *Poème cosmique* falls into the category of ‘eliminated tonality’, whereby any tonal centre is only inferred but never established.¹⁷ The texture is transparent, with any dense chords appearing staccato and bursts of *fortissimo* framed by silences. The trills and chordal tremolos of the early *Poèmes* make a comeback here. Sensitivity to chordal interplays and rhythmic ingenuity in combining textural layers bring Messiaen to mind. Large parts of the piece unfold in two-part counterpoint, the melodic shapes interacting in ever-unpredictable ways. The last section *Allegro assai* sparkles with garlands of grace notes, repeated notes and *staccato* chords, its coda in *Doppio movimento* and *fortissimo* providing a more conventionally satisfying close to Bacevičius’ last *Poème*.

Described by Daniel Barenboim as ‘a highly gifted pianist and musician, **Gabrielius Alekna** has built a prolific performance and recording career bridging the cultures of his birth country of Lithuania and his present home of the United States. After earning over a dozen major prizes in international competition early in his career – including Second Prize at the Beethoven International Piano Competition in Vienna – he has established himself as a soloist of international renown. Performances include those with the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra (RSO Wien), Juilliard Orchestra, the New Amsterdam and Adelphi Symphony Orchestras (New York), Bilkent Symphony Orchestra (Turkey), the Belarus State Symphony Orchestra (Minsk), and with nearly every major orchestra and ensemble in Lithuania.



¹⁷ Gudžinskaitė, *loc. cit.*, p. 57.

His distinctive programmes and prolific repertoire have taken him to fifteen countries, with solo recitals in Carnegie Hall, the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, both the Musikverein and Bösendorfer Saal in Vienna and Tempelpiaukio Church in Helsinki. Broadcast recordings of his performances have been heard on BBC, WQXR, WWFM, CBC Music, Österreich 1, Bulgarian National Radio and numerous EuroClassic radio programmes.

An avid studio musician, Gabrielius Alekna has a discography which prominently features Lithuanian contemporary and twentieth-century modernist piano repertoire, reflecting his strong affinity for the remarkable avant-garde composers of his country, both past and present. In 2024, he released Vytautas Bacevičius' Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2, completing the cycle after his 2015 recordings of Nos. 3 and 4, all on Naxos. For Toccata Classics, he has released two volumes in an ongoing series of the same composer's solo-piano works. Together, these critically acclaimed albums contain the most comprehensive Bacevičius catalogue of any pianist, and include many first recordings. His collaborators in the studio include two Grammy-nominated musicians, the pianist Ursula Oppens and conductor Christopher Lyndon-Gee with the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, as well as the multiple Grammy-winning producer Judith Sherman.

In 2021, he released a recording of *Chiaroscuro Trilogy*, a work for piano and string orchestra written and dedicated to him by Žibuoklė Martinaitytė. The recording, on Ondine, with the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra and conductor Giedrė Šlekytė, has been praised in numerous reviews and features in publications such as *The New York Times*, *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*.

In live performance, many of his solo recitals and orchestral appearances have come in European and American festivals, such as the Liszt in Vredenburg (Utrecht, Netherlands), the Music Festival of the Hamptons and Ridotto (New York), Piano Century at Alice Tully Hall (New York), Gaida and Vilnius (Lithuania), and Europeisches Musikfest Münsterland (Germany). As a chamber musician, he has shared stages with the cellist Caroline Stinson, percussionist Joe Pereira, violinist Bartłomiej Niziol, thereminist Dalit Warsaw, baritone Modestas Sedlevičius and the Vilnius, Čiurlionis, Mettis and Ciompi String Quartets.

Born and raised in Vilnius, Gabrielius Alkena was the first Lithuanian to receive a Doctorate of Musical Arts from The Juilliard School, where he also earned both a Bachelor's and Master's degree under the tutelage of Jerome Lowenthal. Before attending Juilliard, he studied in

the main Lithuanian arts institutions, the National M. K. Čiurlionis School for the Arts and the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

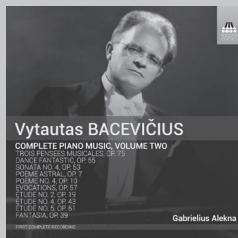
He has a special interest in education and development of young talent. He co-founded the Birštonas Summer Arts Academy (Lithuania) for young musicians and served as Visiting Associate Professor at the Music Academy of Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas, Lithuania), where he also assumed a role of Program Coordinator for Collaborative Activities with the Juilliard School. He is a former faculty member at CUNY Brooklyn College and serves as substitute faculty at The Juilliard School. In 2023, he joined the Recording Academy/Grammys as a voting member. He lives with his family in New York City.

More Vytautas Bacevičius on Toccata Classics

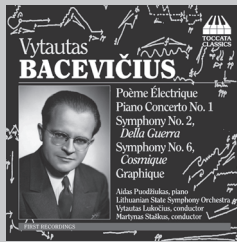
TOCC 0134



TOCC 0328



TOCC 0049



‘An impressive release all around, and a perfect demonstration of the good work Toccata Classics is doing in giving voice to under-appreciated composers’
—Gavin Dixon, *Fanfare*

★★★★★
—customer rating
on Amazon.com



‘These fine performances and recordings [...] give this colourful music the best possible platform.’
—Guy Rickards,
Gramophone



Recorded on 8, 9 and 11 July 2024 in the Great Hall of the Lithuanian National Philharmonic,
Vilnius

Recording engineer: Vilius Keras

Producer: Aleksandra Kerienė

Mastering: Vilius Keras and Aleksandra Kerienė, Baltic Mobile Recordings (www.bmr.lt)

This recording was financed by the Lithuanian Council for Culture.



LITHUANIAN
COUNCIL FOR
CULTURE

Booklet texts: Gabrielius Alekna and Šarūnas Nakas

Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)

Typesetting and layout: ALN Design, St Albans

Executive Producer: Martin Anderson

© Toccata Classics, London, 2025

® Toccata Classics, London, 2025

Toccata Classics CDs are available in the shops and can also be ordered from our distributors around the world, a list of whom can be found at www.toccataclassics.com. If we have no representation in your country, please contact:

Toccata Classics, 16 Dalkeith Court, Vincent Street, London SW1P 4HH, UK

Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com

VYTAUTAS BACEVIČIUS Piano Music, Volume Three

1	<i>Poème contemplation (Poème No. 1), Op. 5</i> (1926)	5:18
2	<i>Poème mystique (Poème No. 2), Op. 6</i> (1926)	5:26
3	<i>Vision, Op. 30</i> (1937)	3:26
	Three Moments, Op. 41 (1946)*	11:09
4	No. 1 Hope	3:55
5	No. 2 Elevation	3:02
6	No. 3 Splendour	4:12
7	<i>Poème No. 5, Op. 42</i> (1946)	5:34
	Suite No. 1, Op. 47 (1949)	12:41
8	I <i>Moderato pathétique</i>	3:11
9	II <i>Allegro energico</i>	2:31
10	III <i>Moderato scherzando (quasi Allegretto)</i>	1:58
11	IV <i>Lento bizzaramente</i>	2:31
12	V <i>Allegretto leggieramente (quasi Moderato)</i>	2:30
13	<i>Chanson triste, Op. 56</i> (1954)	5:55
	Suite No. 3, Op. 60 (1956)	9:35
14	I <i>Allegretto</i>	2:07
15	II <i>Allegro moderato</i>	1:28
16	III <i>Lento</i>	4:18
17	IV <i>Presto</i>	1:42
18	<i>Poème cosmique, Op. 65</i> (1959)	7:37

TT 66:43

Gabrielius Alekna, piano

* FIRST RECORDING