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A PREMONITION OF WAR IN LITHUANIAN MUSIC AND LITERATURE (2021–2022)

Abstract. *The article draws attention to the impact of the political situation on the conceptuality of music and the formation of paradigmatic situations of musical language in newly created pieces. Such examples can be found in the new works of three young authors: Mykolas Natalevičius (b. 1985) «Gas Flare», Andrius Šiurys (b. 1991) «Non-finito» and Dominykas Digimas (b. 1993) «Sub-silence» for flute and organ, 2022. Here the music is identified with space — with the emerging connection between space and the universe, with the analogy of burning space and emptiness, consolidating the paradigm of space and its transformations in new music. In other words, the transcendentalism of its visual landscape is linked to the air as a matter via the acoustic sound poetics of air-controlled instruments, flute and organ. It is particularly related to the paradigm of the vanishing and the birth of sound or the rebirth in a hum, a particular analogy of the apocalypse and the creation of an alternative — the other space. In that sense, the works of this new music can be filled with a premonition of war and the annihilation of humanity, what their content speaks about. Natalevičius's «Gas Flare» talks about the ecological death of the earth, related to the extraction of gas energy from the depths of the earth. About the flame, its overall destructive irrationality and the eclipse of the economy. Šiurys's «Non-finito» tells about the interaction of timelines leading to a rationally cold aggressive nothingness, the so-called «The Devil's stairs» (according to G. Ligeti) and the static of eternity. Digimas's «Sub-silence» is a work of post-apocalyptic hope, where the depths of silence hide the impulses of the light-shadow interaction, the mysterious movement of the regrouping of the layers of nature and the mystifying rebirth — the silent turn of the world. The latter is a characteristic phenomenon of Lithuanian art philosophy, the pulsation of the links between art and nature, which Digimas transforms into the present in his own way, concentrating even more on the paradigmatic situation of a global transformation.*

Meanwhile, the literature opens up a direct historical context connected to the present: Russia versus Europe. It is the latest book, «Peter's Empress», volumes I and II by Kristina Sabaliauskaitė (b. 1974), the most popular writer in Lithuania at this moment (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2019, 2021). Here, the writer exposes the horrific wounds of Russian history, the implied terror and threats to Europe, based on the historical facts of the era of Peter I, told through the perception of his wife Marta Skowronska, who originally came from a Lithuanian-Polish family, living in town and went through all the possible shifts and metamorphosis to become the Empress of Russia. The difficult-to-take-in topicality of Sabaliauskaitė's book, opening the sick Russian mentality connection between medieval slavery, world domination and being sealed off from foreign influences, a mixture of raging madness and cruelty, was an extremely prophetic literary «blow» in 2021, which shook Lithuania, reminding of terrible experiences before the start of a new war. The writer also became an analyst of the actual today's situation, presenting translations of «Peter's Empress» in Europe and at book forums, where her work and thoughts about Russia's mental identity became a sharp intellectual instrument capable of explaining the «implausibility» of the war to a nurtured European democracy. Thus, she and her literature became direct participants in the defence mission of the hurt nations.

It can be stated that Lithuanian music and literature sensed the essential quiet and later a blazing turn of the world and unfolded Baltic Mannerheim's line on its horizons.

Key words: *premonition, war, global turn, space, flare, non-finito, sub-silence, terror, Russia, aggression.*

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ПЕРЕДЧУТТЯ ВІЙНИ В ЛИТОВСЬКІЙ МУЗИЦІ ТА ЛІТЕРАТУРІ (2021–2022)

Анотація. *Анотація. У статті привертається увага до впливу політичної ситуації на концептуальність музики та на формування парадигматичних ситуацій музичної мови у нових творах. Приклади можна знайти у нових*

творах трьох молодих авторів: Миколаса Наталевічюса (нар. 1985) «Спалах газу», Андріуса Шуруса (нар. 1991) «Non-finito» та Домінікаса Дігімаса (нар. 1993) «Суб-тиша для флейти та органу», 2022. У них музика ідентифікується з простором — з народженням почуття зв'язку між простором та Всесвітом, з аналогією між простором, що палає, та пусткою, підсилюючи парадигму простору та його трансформацій у сучасній музиці. Іншими словами, трансценденталізм її візуального ландшафту пов'язаний з повітрям як матерією через посередництво акустичної поетики інструментів, які контролюються повітрям, — флейти та органу. Це особливо пов'язано з парадигмою зникнення та народження звуку або його воскресіння у гоміні, постає конкретна аналогія з апокаліпсисом та створенням альтернативи — іншого простору. У цьому сенсу, твори цієї нової музики можуть бути сповнені передчуттям війни та знищення людства, про що каже їхній зміст. У «Спалаху газу» Наталевічюса йдеться про екологічну загибель Землі, пов'язану з видобуванням енергії газу із земних надр. Йдеться про полум'я з його деструктивною ірраціональністю та крах економіки. «Non-finito» Шуруса розповідає про взаємодію часів, що призводить до раціонально холодної, агресивної порожнечі, так званих «сходинок диявола» (за Дж. Лігеті) та статичності вічності. «Під-тиша» Дігімаса — це твір про пост-апокаліптичну надію, де глибини тиші приховують імпульси взаємодії між світлом та тінню, таємничого руху перегрупування шарів природи та містичного відродження — мовчазного повороту світу. Ця ідея характерна для литовської філософії мистецтва як пульсація ланок між мистецтвом та природою, яку Дігімас по-своєму трансформує у сучасність, ще більшою мірою зосереджуючись на парадигмальній ситуації глобальних змін.

Тим часом література розкриває безпосередній історичний контекст, пов'язаний з теперішнім: Росія проти Європи. Йдеться про останню за часом публікацію книги, «Імператриця Петра», томи I та II, написану Крістіною Сабалаяускайте (нар. 1974), яка наразі є найпопулярнішою письменницею в Литві (Вільнюс: Балтос ланкос, 2019, 2021). Письменниця оголює жакливі рани російської історії, можливий терор та загрози для Європи, базуючись на історичних фактах доби правління Петра I, переповідаючи крізь призму сприйняття його дружини, Марти Скавронської, яка походила з литовсько-польської міської родини і пережила всі можливі повороти долі та метаморфози перед тим, як стати Імператрицею російською. Складна для сприйняття актуальність твору Сабалаяускайте, де розкривається хворий менталітет росіян, зв'язок між середньовічним рабством, претензіями на світове панування та ізоляваність від іноземних впливів, суміш дикого шаленства та жорстокості, виявилася вельми пророчим літературним «вибухом» у 2021 році, який потряс Литву, нагадуючи про жакливе минуле перед початком нової війни. Письменниця виступає також з аналізом теперішньої ситуації, презентуючи «Імператрицю Петра» у перекладах в Європі та під час книжкових форумів, де її твір та роздуми щодо ментальної ідентичності Росії стали гострим інтелектуальним інструментом для пояснення цієї «неймовірної» війни для зрілих європейських демократій. У такий спосіб вона та її твори перетворилися на безпосередніх учасників місії на захист постраждалих народів. Можна стверджувати, що литовська музика та література відчули екзистенційну тишу, а за нею палаючий поворот світу, та розгорнули балтійську лінію Маннергейма на своєму горизонті.

Ключові слова: передчуття, війна, глобальний поворот, простір, спалах, non-finito, під-тиша, терор, Росія, агресія.

Lithuanian culture, in significant part, is based on historical imagination and experience to fight for freedom. Three Lithuanian composers were asked to create new music works for flute and organ for Lithuanian National Independence Day, celebrated on February 16 since 1918. The event took place in Berlin Epiphany Church Charlottenburg on Sunday, February 20, 2022. Three new pieces occasionally happened to be the signs of feeling the premonition of the war in different ways. This article will take an insight into the music of Lithuanian composers of the young generation and their feelings toward the world's future. There is a unique point of view on the transformation of the Baltic phenomenon in contemporary music, which explores the eternity of space and time as transcendental landscapes in music. The process continues as a warning of the looming war in an interdisciplinary and radical movement explored by musicologist Edvardas Šumila (Šumila, 2021, p. 52).

The historical imagination becomes a paradigm, starting with famous works by Bronius Kutavičius (1932–2021) like «The last Pagan Rites» (1978), what musicologist Rūta Gaidamavičiūtė describes as modern archetypes of processual dramaturgy (Gaidamavičiūtė, 2005, p. 73). The danger of Russia as a terror state is analysed by authors Thymothy Snyder («Litewska pisarka o Rosji», 2022) and Felshinsky and Stancev (Felshtinski, 2022).

The contemporary image transforms the experiences of history and national feelings of eternal recovery in the new quality of space enlightened in spectralism — in scapes of evanescent sounds and their acoustic aspects. There are three aspects of «evanescent space»: burning impulse of irrationality (gas flare), deep dimensions of the connections of the past–future in the layers of memory (sub-silence) and hidden progressive aggression of strange history circle (non-infinity). All three works explore the mystery of the music world in their un-

derground specificity of instrumental philosophy of both instruments filled with air dimension — the flute and the organ.

Mykolas Natalevičius' (born 1985) piece «Gas Flare» for flute and organ is inspired by ecological problems about producing gas as a global energy source (see: www.worldbank.org). In different countries around the world, particularly in the deserts of Africa, there are many gas drills, which flares overpower nature, increases illnesses and the number of people's deaths and inhibit the recreation of nature. This global ecological crisis results from climate change and the road to the evanescence of life. With the collapse of *epochs without wars*, the «Gas Flare» leads us to the burning spaces of existence in the world. Natalevičius work named «Gas Flare» takes on that image in music: the image of *nothing* — gas emerges in the indescribable form as the air on earth, the blow of wind, and irrational impulses reaching us out of the depths of the earth and becomes a *flare* — dangerous, uncontrolled burning air, leading to the elimination of life, through the emptiness of low acoustic sound space. Natalevičius's piece «Gas Flare» has three waves of «burning» emblematic factures for flute and organ, instrumental and arrhythmic intensive figurative movements, collapsing in some static-emptiness. This type of air blowing is produced in flute and organ as sound-space instruments of depths in unknown movements and unceasing static. The instruments create the image of air as a burning space — a Gas Flare, some irrationally controversial phenomenon for natural existence.

The piece «Gas Flare» points to our fragility and the indecisiveness of global policies. There is a hidden drama of contemporary society, even with its dualism towards energy sources. It is particularly actual in Germany with the naivety of «real politics» leading to Russia's domination as a source of gas in Europe. Natalevičius's piece could be a warning sign for times of tension speaking about economic power in Europe.

The second piece, «Non-finito», is composed by Andrius Šiurys (born 1991). It could be compared with György Ligeti's (1923–2006) «Lux Aeterna» (1966), «Atmosphères» (1961), «Volumina» (1966), «Requiem» (1965) and special «The Devils Staircase» (2001). Continuity of sound changes the paradigm in Ligeti's piano music as a work of the eternal uncounted movement. There is serial statics that leads to the dimension of times and feel-

ings of the epochs, the *constant turn of the world*. This perspective emerges in Andrius Šiurys's work «Non-finito» for organ and flute as a single line of mutual work. The sound of both instruments integrates into the united sound, travelling from depths to heights in mysterious labyrinths of *lonely* four lines — endless melodies in space and time. There is the darkness of organ low bass sounds (pedals) and serial manual lines' movements in steps travelling in the *unknown* direction up and down in space, vanishing and appearing without great impulse or break, just as the line itself — *non-finito*. The impulses create themselves and disappear without an exigency or reason. This piece is mysterious and full of existential, aggressive, and intonational secrets, never looking back into history. Unlike Natalevičius's piece about «burning space», this one is called «Non-finito» and depicts the feeling of aggression of continuity in time. «Non-finito» poses a new paradigm of *never vanishing* strange soundscapes. The idea of eternity exposes aggression hidden in the nonsense of lost humanity, which seeks cold dominance over *others' space*.

The third new piece of prewar time is composed by Dominikas Digimas (*1993) and called «Sub-silence». In opposition to the aggressive energy of «Non-finito», this creation delves into the dimension of deep calmness of being under the water or the earth. Nevertheless, there are some well-hidden impulses of changes, uprising life and light shifting process. The young composer operates the sound of the organ to create that deepest calmness of the earth and the sound of the flute in short fragments of *post-existential non-melody*, just like the «blowing of the wind», «waves of air» and images of the «stardust falling down from the night sky»... The most silent piece exposes a specific linguistic game in its title: *sub-silence* in Lithuanian means *Sub-tyla*, similar to the word *subtili*, meaning *delicate*... This almost evanescent line between steps of silenced and louder emerging fragments of musical cells, neither the real motifs of melody nor harmony, is essential in the most peaceful, harmonising, stabilising way of existence. This *almost vanishing line* of existence in sound leads to unknown but very trustful and sensitive darkness... Digimas's «Sub-silence» is in deep opposition to every chaos, apocalyptic turn, every life experience of the breakdown, every closing down and social aggression. The composer even emancipates soundscape from structural limitations to continual transition,

allowing the instrument to breathe freely without carrying formal images of «being at work». Such music resembles the philosophy of natural beings and becomes a modern «scientific» and classical ideal for thoughts realising eternal life streams. It could also be felt as a very comforting piece of music, like pieces of classical music.

These three compositions have in common the feeling of the premonition of war in space: burning and «empty» space, hidden aggressions space of incremental changes similar to the «climbing stairs» in dark-heaven dimensions and deep calmness of *space under space*, shifting to life impulses and disappearing again... It is the music of the *prewar* or possibly the *post-war* — the post-civilisational feelings and images.

Compared with the prominence of literature of the prewar time, texts open a straightforward crucial viewpoint of turn to history context regarding complicated Europe's links toward Russia. Here, the attention concentrates on two volumes of a new book by writer Kristina Sabaliauskaitė (born 1974), «Peter's Empress», volume I, and II, published by Baltos lankos, 2021 (Sabaliauskaitė, 2021). In these novels, Europe's inability to «never understand» Russia is explained in the shocking openness of 21st-century manner, speaking about cognitive confusion, mental illness, destructiveness, cruelty, and controversial killing of humans that progresses with relations with the West. Sabaliauskaitė's work is based on historical documents, archives, research and points of *unbelievable truth* about Russian history. This dreadful truth makes «Peter's Empress» very contemporary with its glaring content and particular writers' style, covering the traumatic East European political point of view. The Empire paradigm of the «Russian World» should be the breaking point for literature in style and content.

The constant and controversial Russia — Europe collusion grows into a hard-handed experience, known from documentaries and researched in archives, describing Russia's «Europeanisation» in the epoch of Peter I. The book «Peter's Empress» exposes the transformation of a viewpoint of a woman with Lithuanian — Polish European roots into a Russian Empress. This woman is Marta Skowronska, who was Peter's mistress, wife and mother of his children and, after his death, became an Empress of Russia. In both volumes, Sabaliauskaitė describes this longer-than-200-year-old history through visualisation of contemporary bloody horror and grotesque crazy-

ness of Russia seeking overall greatness, imposing barbaric Imperialism, and the need to dominate over everyone, the world and even God. Peter's will has united the Tsar and the God to rule the world: «Vsia vlast ot Boga» (Sabaliauskaitė, 2021, p. 238, 242). The contemporarity of this book is evident and sharp, shaking all sensitive beings to the core, leading toward a personal protest common for the Western liberal intelligentsia, the feeling of danger to touch Russia, to insult her «as she is a monster». The contemporary intelligentsia of the West obviously is **not ready** to believe what Sabaliauskaitė describes as Peter's «Great Russia». Discussion about her book even today leads to academic opposition and protests, but nonetheless, she became politically active in connection to the representation of her book and the new war in Europe started by Russia. In Amsterdam, April 2022, and other forums (EBIT, or «The Open Books», September 2022) («K. Sabaliauskaitės balsas Europoje», 2022) in her statements talking about Russia, Sabaliauskaitė points out what mistakes are constantly made by the Western world to understand Russia as *culture*, but not really as a *terror state*.

Sabaliauskaitė, speaking about Russian mentality, points to a special dualism that leads to controversy and craziness: being enclosed in its own depressive circle of emptiness, all estranged in the wrong environment, non-worthy of existence and, on the contrary, burning in endless passion for dominating, ready to explode because of the importance of its own world, greedy to punish the others for their existence, to eliminate everyone around as enemies («Tamsioji valstybė», 2022). Russia's victory is always a catastrophe to other nations, firstly to their neighbours and further to nations around the globe. Sabaliauskaitė tries to explain this catastrophic phenomenon in her politically active statements in the Netherlands and Poland («Litewska pisarka o Rosji», 2022) and it is also described in her historical book, witnessing how «dangerous is to offend Russia», what goes into its «devil's staircase» is «impossible to believe». Her book always raises the question of whether it «could be a truth» and «based documentary» and is distinctly comparable with the new Russia war. It is indisputable for Baltic readers, Poland citizens, and the neighbouring states of the «Evil Empire», as President Ronald Reagan called it (Regan, 1983).

However, how long is the road for us to go? Infinity of «The Devil's Staircase» and descent

into hell, how it has been described in Sabaliauskaitė's literature work, still does not receive an answer in contemporary Europe. Maybe it is hidden in the music as an alternative to the world, a feeling of hope.

Conclusions. Literature and music of the pre-war period are radicalised by feelings of the dangerous experience of repeating history turns.

The feeling of premonition of war in Lithuanian literature became a turning point to show Russia in reality as a state of terror full of its dangerous imperialistic inadequate «greatness» and not as only a state of great culture. We highlight the maniacal desire to dominate and destroy everything, including their freedom-seeking people. It is a country of threat to all European neighbours. In Sabaliauskaitė's texts, this almost unreal image of bloody fields — the «bloodlands» (Snyder, 2012) left after Russian army forces marched in Europe opens in front of the readers' eyes. The mental and physical damage left to humankind was never exposed in literature in this manner. The idea of Russia as a state of culture is adored by the West, which in Sabaliauskaitė's texts seems as a very wrong and deluded approach. The «Peter's Empress» raises the topic of Russia in the new actualised paradigm of mental illness — a paranoia of Imperialism leading to total destruction from the body to soul. Similar statements are voiced by Russian writers from abroad: Yury Felshtinsky and Michail Stancev (Felshtinski, 2022).

However, in Lithuanian music, the feeling of the premonition of war is transformed to explore *the other space*, shaping music as a form of a whole, as a global idea of survival over the epochs. Space, as such, unlocks its importance for the existence of humankind and nature. Here we have three different pieces /three spaces of music, three soundscapes — the «other space» landscapes: 1) *burning space* (Natalevičius «Gas Flare»), 2) non-existence — *lifeless space* (Šiurys «Non-Finito»), 3) *undercover space* — the mystery of impulses of life (Digimas «Sub-silence»). All three spaces are based on research of sound cells on intonation as the only instinct of survival or possibly «negotiations for surviving with the devil». There are turning points of new Lithuanian existentialism, full of images of the post-times (*post-war times*).

In some way, three musical pieces by young Lithuanian composers approach with their sensi-

tiveness of soundscape to calm down the current situation. This closeness is a contemporary harmonising feeling of the world, defending the civilisation if it is possible to express it this way, defending it together with the bravery of Ukrainian military forces. Without them, there would not be more thoughts about the new music and what it means, and no ideas about surviving for post-war humanity. Now our hearts beat with them in hope.

Slava Ukraine!

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