

## Multifariousness of Interpretations of Eduardas Balsys’ Ballet “Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes”

**Abstract.** On the occasion of the 100th birth anniversary of composer Eduardas Balsys, the article aims to show the lasting value and multifariousness of the interpretations of one of his most popular works – “Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes” (1960) ballet, as well as to disclose their different aesthetic principles and the stylistics of the movements employed, which is determined both by a rich literary source – a fairy tale and a myth – and current trends. The strengths and weaknesses of the productions are analysed from the aspect of the synthesis of music and choreography that is essential for the genre of ballet and highlights or diminishes the role of music in the ballet, creating a new synergistic quality of the work.

**Keywords:** Balsys, ballet “Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes”, music, interpretation, choreography, scenography, synthesis, synergy.

### Introduction

The paper analyses the variety of stage interpretations of Balsys’ ballet “Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes” from the 1960 premiere to the latest production for the composer’s 100th birth anniversary in 2019. In the changing historical (political and cultural) context of the Lithuanian state, and its cultural aesthetic principles the goal of this article is to reveal the choreographers interest in Balsys’ music, which demonstrates a high level of its values and its enduring vitality. They are also conditioned by Balsys’ libretto, which is based on the Baltic myth and is relevant today.

Theatre critic Aliodija Ruzgaitė in a 1989 interview wondered, “Why is there no Balsys’ ‘Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes’ in the repertoire?” According to the ballet critic, we will not create national ballet with works by foreign authors; and having in mind the latest ones we should not forget the old ones (Žiūraitytė 1989: 34). Today two versions of Balsys’ ballet are performed in Lithuania. The author of the first is choreographer George Williamson (2015, Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre [LNOBT])<sup>1</sup>, the second is by Martynas Rimeikis (2019 at the Music Theatre in Klaipėda)<sup>2</sup>. All in all, there are five interpretations of this ballet: here we can also add the ballet screening based on Vytautas Grivickas’ production, the only Lithuanian film-ballet ever (1965)<sup>3</sup>, and the rarely performed concert version Suite from the Ballet (1961) as well as Suite for Cello and Piano (about 2010), arranged by David Geringas.

Balsys, who wrote the libretto for this ballet, shared his experience:

“Sometimes composers have to write librettos themselves due to certain circumstances of their life. Do we have professional librettists or writers who are familiar with the specifics of music, theatre and dance? However, I do not think that a librettist is necessarily a ‘person from outside’. Both composers and choreographers are required to show initiative and search for topics. However, a composer who does not know the specifics of ballet needs to be appropriately informed. There was a time when Grivickas, who felt the lack of national ballets, was an enthusiast who carried a number of librettos in his briefcase. Several of them were used by composers. Choreographers themselves must be interested in a good theme that suits the specifics of the genre. They could show the composer the real road. Nevertheless, it is advisable to approach a composer-symphonist, as ballet music is symphonic with clear dramaturgical accents, colourfully orchestrated. Because I feel I am a symphonist by nature, some time ago I undertook to write a ballet though I was never encouraged. Having gained some experience, I share the view that writing a good ballet is harder than writing an opera. That’s why we have so few ballets” (Žiūraitytė 1981: 2–3).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Designer: Louie Whitmore; light designer: Howard Hudsonas; conductors: David Geringas and Martynas Staškus. Premiere: LNOBT, 20 November 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Set designer: Marijus Jacovskis; costume designer: Elvita Brazdylytė; light designer: Levas Kleinas; conductor: Modestas Barkauskas; staged at the Music theatre in Klaipėda; premiere at the concert hall in Palanga on 16 August 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Writer of the script: Balsys; choreographer: Grivickas; cameramen: Algimantas Mockus, Aleksandras Digimas. On the list of Osvaldas Balakauskas’ works at the LMIC “The Zodiac Signs” (1986) is also called a film-ballet; its music was used in the 1995 film collage of the same title.

<sup>4</sup> Eglė [Spruce]. “Eglė the Queen of Serpents”, alternatively “Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes”, is one of the best-known Lithuanian tales with many references to the Baltic mythology:

Lithuanian composers have created about fifty ballets; half of them have been produced. The first one-act ballets (Balys Dvarionas' "Piršlybos" [Matchmaking], Juozas Gruodis' "Jūratė and Kastytis", Vytautas Bacevičius' "Šokių sukuryje" [In the Whirl of Dance], 1933) seem to capture the sooner or later realized perspective of ballet music – realistic folk, combining folklore elements and contemporary means of expression as well as avant-garde.

### 1. Interpretation by Vytautas Grivickas

The first premiere of Balsys' ballet (1960, ballet master Grivickas, scenic artist Juozas Jankus, conductor Chaimas Potašinskas) was an outstanding cultural event of that time, which completed the development of the post-war stage of Lithuanian ballet, as well as witnessing the beginning of the stylistic renewal of Lithuanian music that should be associated with a generalized interpretation of folklore and more modern means of the expression of musical language. The composers Juozas Pakalnis ("Sužadėtinė" [The Betrothed], 1943), Julius Juzeliūnas ("Ant marių kranto" [On the Shore of the Lagoon], 1953), Juozas Indra ("Audrone", 1957), who created ballets during the Second World War and post-war years developed an epic genre, narrative – symphonism that is also called romantic realism.

Grivickas, a proponent of narrative dramatic ballet<sup>5</sup>, a ballet master who was a prominent figure in Lithuanian theatre, staged the above mentioned and other ballets. He focused on the consistent development of the plot and the acting of dancers, and strove to give ballet theatre psychological depth and to enrich it emotionally. Composers generalised symphonic scores by specific musical means, rising above the small details of librettos. The symphonism of the epic genre of earlier ballets was transformed into distinct lyrical dramatic symphonism in Balsys' "Eglė", which was more conducive to the uninterrupted development of composition and was closer to the specifics of ballet. The composer created a compelling symphonic score for the ballet, which became a textbook example of Lithuanian ballet. The well thought-out system of leitmotifs conveying the main idea of the piece, the dynamic characterisation of the personages, the elaborate lyrical scenes, and the ingenious orchestration fully revealed the talents of Balsys, a playwright and symphonist. At the same time, the composer seemed reluctant to experiment and sought to renew the art of ballet from within.

The content of the fairy tale (essentially a myth) has a dramaturgical purpose in the score that reflects the composer's concentrated libretto. Balsys, the ballet's screenwriter and composer, did not avoid the realistic nature of the tale, but also developed the drama of the protagonists' feelings intensively, highlighting it. Ballet master Grivickas, who undertook to stage the ballet saw the original nature of the music and set new challenges for himself<sup>6</sup>. In his diary, he even called the production experimental, and in choreography, as in music, sought development on the principle of leitmotifs (Grivickas 2005: 198). The sense of ballet as a theatrical genre (in the sense of literary drama) is quite vivid in the music, therefore the first production of "Eglė" though levelling the tendencies of musical renewal, was acceptable and even welcome in the context of

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One warm summer day, Eglė, the youngest daughter of a local farmer, went bathing in the sea with her two sisters. Afterwards, returning to the shore to get dressed, she found a serpent in her clothes. To her surprise, the serpent spoke to her in a man's voice and demanded that she promise to become his wife for the return of her clothes. Faced with an immediate need to get dressed and not thinking about possible future consequences, Eglė agreed. Three days later a great number of serpents pulling a wagon showed up at Eglė's parents' farm to claim the bride. Eglė's family tried to trick the serpents, but finally, wise to the trickery, serpents succeeded in taking Eglė with them to their master. At the seashore they were met by Žilvinas, a handsome young man, the Serpent King, who took Eglė to a nearby island and then to his palace under the sea, where they wed. Eglė and Žilvinas lived together happily and had three sons, Ažuolas [Oak], Uosis [Ash] and Beržas [Birch], and a daughter, Drebulė [Aspen], their youngest.

One day the children started asking about their mother's former home. Eglė became homesick and asked Žilvinas to allow her and the children to visit her parents' farm. Žilvinas was against it and set a number of what he thought were impossible conditions. Eglė, however, with the help of a local sorceress, was able to accomplish them and Žilvinas had to allow Eglė and the children to go. The reunion with the family was such a happy event that Eglė's family did not want to let them return to the sea and decided to kill Žilvinas. After demanding Eglė's children to reveal a secret how to call him from the sea, the youngest daughter Drebulė became frightened and told the pass phrase. Eglė's twelve brothers called Žilvinas and killed him with scythes. Not knowing her husband's fate and ending her stay with her parents, brothers, and sisters, Eglė returned to the seashore and called Žilvinas. In reply only a bloody foam appeared. In her grief, after she realized that Žilvinas was dead, Eglė transformed her family into trees – her sons into an oak, an ash and a birch, her daughter into a trembling aspen, and herself into a spruce.

The tale was first published by M. Jasewicz in 1837. Salomėja Nėris, a Lithuanian poet, wrote a poem called *Eglė žalčių karalienė* (1940), which is based on the motifs of the tale. See *Lithuanian legends & lore: Eglė, Queen of Serpents* (n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Soviet authorities approved of and cultivated the so-called realistic dramatic ballet (called drama-ballet).

<sup>6</sup> "Dance is foremost; pantomime should be avoided; the lightness of arms, the principle of leotard in the design of costumes; the laconic nature of sets" (Grivickas 2005: 199).

Lithuanian culture during Soviet occupation<sup>7</sup>. It was praised by conductor Potašinskas (see the quote below) and prima ballerina Leokadija Aškelovičiūtė. Noting Grivickas' creative period, which was characterized by strong competition between the storyline (drama) and symphonic ballet (symphodance), the prima ballerina emphasized that Grivickas had always paid more attention to the storyline, directing and the expressiveness of roles (ibid: 439)<sup>8</sup>. According to the ballet dancer Ramutė Janavičiūtė, "Eglė", one of Grivickas' most striking productions, had no modern intricacies and was a ballet full of the Lithuanian spirit – with its music, choreography and the dancers' emotional performance (ibid: 428).

## 2. Interpretation by Elegijus Bukaitis

The staging of Grivickas and the subsequent productions of "Eglė" revealed a greater or smaller conflict between music and choreography. Elegijus Bukaitis' (1976) interpretation was fundamentally different from Grivickas' (1960) staging, but both productions did not satisfy either the composer or the lovers of his music<sup>9</sup>. Conductor Potašinskas who participated in the second staging recalls: "In 1976, Balsys was already different; having gone a long way to the new worlds of sounds, he was more refined, and probably the pure innocence inherent in the music of the ballet seemed too simple to him. I personally prefer the first production" (Narbutienė 1999: 375).

Conductor Aleksa remembers the composer's reaction to the 1976 performance of Bukaitis:

"After viewing a rehearsal for the upcoming performance, the Maestro exploded, 'I'm taking the score back!' Balsys complained about the ballet master, who, in his opinion, had not studied the score deeply enough and had failed to embody it in the dance. "When I was writing 'Eglė', I saw every movement of the dance of the characters ... Dance must express the exact content of my music." The Maestro went on to make many concrete suggestions; as he cooled down, he seemed to have accepted what he had seen. I met the composer shortly after the premiere. His mood was constantly changing. Both joy and bitterness ..." (ibid: 379–380). According to Aškelovičiūtė, "The reason for the failure was the unsuccessful choreographic solution and the flaws in the logic of the production directing. I could not accept the accusations made by the composer Balsys against the dancers of 'Eglė'. In the current choreographic interpretation, the performers will not be able to improve the situation. In creating the role of Eglė in the film-ballet [based on Grivickas' staging – A.Ž.], I deeply felt and understood the beauty of Balsys' music (Šabasevičius 2008: 159; quote from Leokadija Aškelovičiūtė's interview with an unnamed person, possibly unpublished; from her personal archive)<sup>10</sup>.

However, choreographer Bukaitis' aspiration to speak in a modern manner was noticed and quite positively appreciated. A critic from Latvia wrote after the performance in Riga: "Classical dance, plastic and ethnographic elements have been quite organically combined, employing a stylistic unity of realistic images and fiction. His choreographic thinking is in line with the aesthetics of the ballet of the 1970s ... the whole production is polyphonic, it develops with a purpose" (Bite 1979). According to Henrikas Kunavičius, "There was too much on the stage. Everything was important and significant. The performers wearing motley apparel disappeared in the motley set, while the monochrome ones blurred. ... The duets are interesting, musical. Everything was done through dance; there were nothing unnecessary. It is a new stage of Lithuanian ballet" (Kunavičius, Urbonavičius 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Justinas Bašinskas' ballet "Užkeiktieji vienuoliai" [Cursed Monks], which was staged in 1984 in the same style, was already in sharp contrast to the ballet's choreographic tendencies of the time, and seemed inopportune and obsolete.

<sup>8</sup> Asaf Messerer also emphasized Grivickas' dramatic directing talent: "The joyful, full-bodied sense of the creative openness of the troupe was revealed in the ballet 'Eglė' ... The ballet has scenes that rise to real dramatic heights. First and foremost, it is the interrogation scene where the angry, vengeful brothers seek to get Drebulytė's confession; Eglė's farewell is also an extremely exciting and poetic concluding scene" (Branda, Sovetskaya Litva, 25 December 1963; quoted according to Grivickas 2005: 250). See footnote 4.

<sup>9</sup> Balsys talked about this on a TV show on 26 September 1980, although the first premiere, according to Dalia Balsytė (his daughter), gave the composer satisfaction (see the programme text: "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes". Music Theatre, Klaipėda. Musical August at the Seaside. Klaipėda, 2019; also Narbutienė 1999: 86, 98, 375).

<sup>10</sup> In 1965 ballet artist and art critic Lidija Motiejūnaitė wrote: "In the film a lot has been discovered through debate and for a good reason – after all, a film-ballet is still an unusual film genre. ... Our authors decided to look for a new way of ballet screening: not to put the ballet performance on the screen, but to reveal the concept of the work of art and its main idea by means of choreography and cinema. And the authors succeeded. "Eglė" is a genre per se, not a film-performance, but a poetic, inspirational film-ballet where inventive choreographic arrangements blend harmoniously with the rich language of the film" (quoted in Grivickas 2005: 273).

On the one hand, Balsys' music had already advanced beyond the rather realistic, dramatic concept of the first production. On the other hand, Bukaitis' search of innovative means was more closely related to the set (scenic artist Rimtautas Gibavičius) than to the music and the moderately modern concept of Balsys. The capacity of the content of the "Eglė", a fairy tale, a myth and a musical composition as though disconcert those who interpret it.

### 3. Interpretation by Egidijus Domeika

The version of Egidijus Domeika (1995, scenic artist Dalia Mataitienė, conductor Jonas Aleksa) seemed very moderate after Bukaitis' experiments. The choreography based on Domeika's neoclassical dance was unpretentious, but at times lacked coherence and logic.

Choreographer Domeika's attention to music is most evident in the characteristics of *Drebulytė*, the grass snakes and the performance of some folk dances ("O kai aš..."). It also manifested itself in the choreographic leitmotifs: Žilvinas' simple and suggestive call signal; the repetitive choreographic motifs of the brothers and *Drebulytė*, and the grass snakes' reflect the musical reprises. It is a shame that Domeika could not escape primitiveness. Particularly straightforward were the vengeful brothers' menacing movements with clenched fists, the wringing of the hands of the suffering Mother (and Eglė), the Father's demonstrative walking on and off the stage. These scenes greatly reduced the artistic quality of the action. The choreographic expression, based on an overly general, non-individual language of neoclassical dance did not match the authenticity of the music. Balsys' music in the ballet "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes" created by Domeika was as though separate from the dance, as the choreography, which should play the major role in the ballet, was overshadowed by the music and the vivid sets created by Mataitienė.

According to the scenic artist, the most unexpected interpretations of the tale are employed to achieve a result close to the general idea<sup>11</sup>, but they are not always convincing, for example in Act II, which is full of realism unusual for the underwater world of fantasy. In the *Sea Rhapsody* Balsys transforms the academic ballet *divertissement* into an open, contrasting, compound composition and makes extensive use of reprises and leitmotifs, thus, at first glance, giving the simple *divertissement* suite a special cohesion. The aforementioned features of the score are not reflected in the visual interpretation. The incoherency, diversity of styles and colours of the set highlight the almost inevitable static episodes of the *divertissement*. Nevertheless, given a lack of the national repertoire at the end of the 20th century, this third production of "Eglė" gave the audiences a chance to enjoy Balsys' music that was excellently performed by the theatre orchestra conducted by Aleksa and to see the mature dancing of Loreta Bartusevičiūtė (Eglė).

### 4. Interpretation by George Williamson

In 2015 choreographer Williamson, having familiarised himself with the myth and listened to the music, chose the dynamic curve of Eglė's emotions (a naive, curious girl, happy woman and mother) as the priority of his interpretation, while its climax highlights her spiritual strength<sup>12</sup>. The sophisticated, expressive *Adagio* of love with its modern broken lines became the apex of the partnership between Eglė and Žilvinas. It conveyed the energy contained in the music, which after this passage was created, reduced to tears even the composer himself (see Narbutienė 1999: 85). The composer's tears are expressed with the sounds of Eglė's famous lament which is even more expressively staged. Repeated in the finale, it is created by the choreographer as though a self-punishment (*mea culpa*), vividly imitating a blow to the pit of the stomach, before expressing the unbearable pain of Žilvinas' death in almost hysterical motions. After the sobbing subsides, Eglė's delicate leitmotif and the pain subside. As in the beginning of the act, shadows flicker in the symbolic "heavenly plate". Two figures of Eglė are seen (its twin enveloped in a veil – like a virgin priestess, a fairy or a witch, which disappeared in the new production). Special magical powers, free from gods and human beings, are revealed, which help Eglė bring her children back to nature (Biliūnaitė 2015: 20). The mythological level that passes through Williamson's production like a dotted line is not further developed.

The choreographer's imagination was limited (or misdirected) by his desire to tell a "true" story. This provoked the use of realistic props and *mise-en-scènes*. Knives, scythes, rakes and fists are brandished, axes are used to kill, a village cart is pulled; a "real" (artificial) serpent slides, a sham bride (a young man dressed

<sup>11</sup> See interview with Mataitienė in a programme for "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes", LNOBT, 1995. See footnote 4.

<sup>12</sup> The production of British choreographer Williamson is based on the music edited by Balsys for the aforementioned film-ballet.

as a girl) loses an artificial breast; there are kisses, hugs, kicks (true, stylized); faces are slapped, washing is put out to dry. By the way, just like in Domeika's production traditions and innovations do not merge to be convincing.

In the context of contemporary realities "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes" according to Agnė Biliūnaitė, "an archaic narrative about innovation and loyalty to one's choice, about violence in staunch defence of old traditions" (Biliūnaitė 2015: 21) has become particularly relevant. Let's add the critique of anthropocentrism, a predictable turn in the relationship between animals and humans towards a hybrid society of the future, the emancipation of species ...<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the preconditions for actualizing and modernizing the content of the ballet exist and tempt creators. A vivid version of the modernization of an epic in literature is Vytautas V. Landsbergis' story "The Queen of Serpents", whose narrative is transposed into a real historical era, the whirlwind of post war partisan struggles (Landsbergis 2018). However, it is hardly possible to convey the multi-layered, tense and powerful energy of the myth in ballet and, what is more important, to understand it adequately. The range of the interpretations of the choreographers seems to fluctuate between the extreme poles – the poem-fairy tale by Salomėja Nėris and the old myth, which is unique only to the Latvians and Lithuanians that did not achieve cohesion and remained unrelated.

Myths have to reveal the very essence of life's reality in concentrated expression. According to psychoanalysts, myths and tales have similarities and differences. Even in the face of the encounter with the most wonderful things, tales are told simply and in an ordinary way, as in real life. The more important difference between the two types of storytelling is the end. In myths it is almost always tragic, while fairy tales have a happy end. Symbolically reflected psychological phenomena demonstrate the need to attain a higher stage of personality – the spiritual renewal that occurs when the personal and collective forces of the subconscious become available to a person (Bettelheim 2017: 56–65). The lyrical-dramatic level of Balsys' score most closely combines the fairy tale and mythological motifs of the libretto. It is consistently highlighted in the latest interpretation.

### 5. Interpretation by Martynas Rimeikis

In creating a new version of Balsys' ballet, choreographer Rimeikis openly shared his doubts about the search for the "real way": "There were temptations to look for social problems or mythological links between nature and man in the story of the 'Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes'. But I am glad that I resisted them and decided to find all the answers in Balsys' rich music. I sincerely tell the story the composer chose as I understand it, using his libretto written in the 1960s. And in it I discovered Eglė and Žilvinas' legend of love."<sup>14</sup> The content of the ballet in the score, which reflects the composer's own libretto, is captured with great precision<sup>15</sup>. Conductor Potašinskis stated:

"As a reference point for future Lithuanian ballet, I imagine Balsys' 'Eglė'. This score is not only a great piece of music but also, I would say, a graphic work. I have to work with authors who often shut their eyes to deviations from the musical text (sometimes they do not even seem to remember their own music exactly). While leafing through Balsys' score you feel the composer's respect and love for his work. It also inspires performers and creates a sense of responsibility. A new score of a Lithuanian ballet of this quality would surely delight everyone" (Žiūraitytė 1981: 7).

Rimeikis' choreographic interpretation of Balsys' ballet is organically derived from the music, and a new synergistic quality of ballet emerges, reflecting the most important lyrical dramatic trend in the renewal of music. The chosen "love legend" combines real motifs of the fairy tale and abstract myth, creating conditions for the choreographer to speak in a natural, contemporary way he sees it. The emotionally dramatic content of the music did not allow the choreographer experiment or employ other literary-dramatic "discoveries" that

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this is also that we cannot see Vilnius without its Iron Wolf symbol. (Legend says that the city was founded after Grand Duke Gediminas saw a howling iron wolf in his dream. A wise old man interpreted that this city would become famous all over the world.) See Francione, G. L. *Animals as persons: essays on the abolition of animal exploitation*. Columbia University Press, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> See interview with Rimeikis in a programme for "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes". Music theatre, Klaipėda. Musical August at the Seaside. Klaipėda, 2019. See footnote 4.

<sup>15</sup> According to conductor Modestas Barkauskas, only Act II Scene 3 "Amber and Pearls" are omitted, and the number of "jobs" Žilvinas assigned to Eglė shortened – there is no "cake baking".

could have become alien bodies, which suppress the flight of music, its inner theatricality and imagery. The movements did not elaborate on the narrative-literary content of the fairy tale (partly also of the music), nor did it compound the mythological meaning of the work. The choreographer synthesized them, digging deeper into the concept of the author of the libretto and music. He transformed the emotional dramatic content encoded in Balsys' work into a modern dance that gave meaning to the vitality of the music which has become classical.

The semantics of contemporary dance is minimally verbalized by wavy, circular movements (grass snakes), the palm raised above the head with the fingers spread and closed together (like the serpent's head and crown), the angular movements of Eglė's arms, sensual concealment of the face in the palms ("let me go out", "I promised"), and kisses (when Žilvinas lets Eglė go to her parents' house). The content of the narrative is revealed by the energy of the movements that are adequate to the music – folk dance, which is not cited there (hometown environment), pride (raising the daughter by the feet), the energy that is still "bellicose" (still influenced by spells) and joyful (slight repetitive movements of shoulders welcoming Eglė to Žilvinas' palace) and Žilvinas' call (an emerging outstretched arm). Particularly memorable from the childhood impressions of the ballet is the partially nostalgic anticipation of the removal of the witches' spells and the serpent turning into a prince (not emphasized by the younger generation of choreographers as climax); as though through this change a solution to other possibly deeper problems of the myth's content can be foreseen – the coexistence between one's own and others, between man and animal.

The set of the new production is reduced to the maximum. The scenery was created by the same team as for Rimeikis' premiere "Day and Minute" in April 2019 that was held earlier than "Eglė". Both here and there, the silhouettes of Elvita Brazdylytė's costumes subtly highlight dance, blend seamlessly into the scenery, adding shades of black-and-blue to the previous shades of the grey-white palette in the new production. Marijus Jacovskis, making the stage space larger by placing some of the fishermen's attributes (ropes and chains are around), did not slow down the dance either. The semantic content of the scenery could be more vivid (especially the lighting), more appropriate to the music and the drama that is expanded by choreography. According to Biliūnaitė, "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes' is an archaic narrative that we see in a new light ... You want to experience this tale not only with your mind, heart, but with your whole body – dancing" (Biliūnaitė 2015: 21). All this happens thanks to choreographer Rimeikis.

### Concluding Remarks

The multifariousness of interpretations of the Balsys' ballet testifies to the value of this music on the level of classical music and the depth of the content of the music and libretto. With the changing tendencies of choreographic art and ballet genre, aesthetic attitudes and possibilities of stage design they need constant renewal. The five productions of "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes" reflect the tortuous process of the development of Lithuanian art and history, the changing scale of choreographic art values from narrative "dramatic ballet" to more abstract dance theatre, establishing the synergistic quality of this work for the 100th birth anniversary of Balsys. Therefore the first production of "Eglė" by Grivickas (a proponent of "dramatic ballet") though levelling the tendencies of musical renewal, was acceptable and even welcome in the context of Lithuanian culture during Soviet occupation. In the already fifth interpretation of Balsys' music by Rimeikis the dance movement did not demonstrate in detail the narrative and literary content of the fairy tale, did not add any supplementary meanings to the mythological side of the story. Having studied the libretto and the composer's ideas closely, the choreographer synthesised them. Rimeikis read the emotionally dramatic content (love legend) encoded in Balsys' ballet with contemporary dance, which gives meaning to the vitality of the music creating a new synergistic quality of the work.

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### Eduardo Balsio baletu „Eglė žalčių karalienė“ interpretacijų įvairovė

#### Santrauka

Šiandien, švenčiant kompozitoriaus Eduardo Balsio gimimo 100-metį, Lietuvoje rodomos net dvi jo baletu „Eglė žalčių karalienė“ versijos. Pirmosios autorius – choreografas George'as Williamsonas (dailininkė Louie Whitmore, šviesų dailininkas Howardas Hudsonas, dirigentas Davidas Geringas, 2015, LNOBT), antrosios – Martynas Rimeikis (scenografas Marijus Jacovskis, kostiumų dailininkė Elvita Brazdylytė, šviesų dailininkas Levas Kleinas, dirigentas Modestas Barkauskas, Klaipėdos muzikinis teatras; premjera Palangos koncertų salėje įvyko 2019 m. rugpjūčio 16 d.). Apskritai šio baletu interpretacijų aruodas pripildytas penkiais veikalais. Dar jį papildykime Vytauto Grivicko pastatymu grindžiama baletu ekranizacija – iki šiol vieninteliu lietuvišku filmu-baletu (1965) bei retokai skambančiu koncertiniu variantu – Siuita iš baletu (1961) bei D. Geringo parengta Siuita violončelei ir fortepijonui (apie 2010).

Keturi „Eglės žalčių karalienės“ pastatymai atskleidė ganėtinai konfliktišką lietuvių muzikos ir choreografijos būseną. Vytauto Grivicko (1960) ir Elegijaus Bukaičio (1976) interpretacijos kardinaliai skiriasi, bet jos abi netenkino nei kompozitoriaus (apie tai E. Balsys kalbėjo TV laidoje 1980 m. rugsėjo 26 d.), nei, manau, daugelio šio autoriaus muzikos gerbėjų. E. Balsio muzika jau buvo pažengusi toliau realistinės V. Grivicko pastatymo koncepcijos (dailininkas J. Jankus, dirigentas Ch. Potašinskas). Kita vertus, novatoriški E. Bukaičio ieškojimai labiau susiliejo su scenovaizdžiu (dailininkas Rimtautas Gibavičius) nei su muzika (dirigentas Ch. Potašinskas), nuosaikiai moderniu E. Balsio sumanymu. Egidijaus Domeikos „Eglės žalčių karalienės“ versija (1995, dailininkė D. Mataitienė, dirigentas J. Aleksa), pagrįsta neoklasikiniu šokiu, atrodė perdėm bendrinės, neindividualios kalbos, nepretenzingai „universalios“.

2015 m. G. Williamsonas pastatymo prioritetu pasirinko Eglės jausmų dramos dinaminę kreivę su jos dvasinę stiprybę iškeliančia kulminacija. Tačiau britų choreografo vaizduotė ribojosi siekis pasakoti „tikrą“ istoriją. Tai provokavo naudoti realistiškus atributus ir mizanscenas, kurie glumino. Penktoji – M. Rimeikio – choreografinė interpretacija, manau, yra organiškiausia. Judesys nedetalizavo naratyvinio-literatūrinio pasakos turinio, papildomomis prasmėmis neapsunkino ir mitologinės veikalo prasmės. Choreografas juos sintezavo įsigilinęs į baletu libreto ir muzikos autoriaus sumanymą. E. Balsio veikale užkoduotą emocinį dramatinį turinį M. Rimeikis perskaitė šiuolaikiniu šokiu, įprasminančiu klasika tapusios muzikos gyvybingumą.