

## Eduardas Balsys' Dodecaphony and its Contexts

**Abstract.** The study focuses on the one-hundred year period of 1919–2019, significant for music history in its own way. As is well known, dodecaphony made its public debut in 1919 by the premiere of Josef Matthias Hauer's *Nomos* op. 19, recognised as the first dodecaphonic composition which laid the foundation for the twelve-tone technique, or the law of the series. 1919 was also the year of birth of Eduardas Balsys. The two facts provoked an in-depth study of Balsys' modernist work and its relation with the twelve-tone technique of musical composition. The study provides the context of the Lithuanian culture in the 1960s, the circumstances of Lithuanian composers' acquaintanceship with the dodecaphonic technique, and Balsys' relation with the "formalised" Western compositional method.

**Keywords:** twelve-tone technique, dodecaphony, series, Eduardas Balsys, oratorio, opera, concerto-symphony, monocyclus, free technique.

In the context of Eduardas Balsys' centenary, the issue of dodecaphony in his compositions places the object of research in the mirrors of the history of systemic (theoretical) musicology. Some reflections are helpful to contextualise the facts of the formation of dodecaphony itself. A double reflection links Balsys' year of birth (1919) and the date of emergence of the twelve-tone technique as a method of musical composition. In August of the same 1919, the premiere of the work *Nomos* for piano op. 19 by Josef Matthias Hauer took place in August. As is well known, the said opus was unanimously recognized as the first dodecaphonic composition which laid the foundation for the twelve-tone technique. In other words, the so-called "law" of the twelve tones in a row (*Reihe*) was declared: all 12 chromatic semitones had to sound in a non-repeating way (i.e. before repeating any of them, all the remaining 11 tones had to sound) (Perle 1991: 145). Hauer supplemented his creative declaration of the principle of dodecaphony with theoretical generalisation<sup>1</sup>; he developed and set out his idea in a published work *Vom Wesen des Musikalischen* [On the Essence of Music] (1920). One can argue that the 20th century history of systemic modernism in music composition, which evolved into avant-garde serialism in the postwar years, started in the year of birth of Balsys. The fundamental compositional technique (dodecaphony) absorbed the ideology of post-tonal music and constructive laws as well as the ambitions of the most important participants of the process and the dramas of mutual relations.

An analysis of human and professional relations between Hauer and Schönberg<sup>2</sup> had long deserved not only the philosophical generalisation in Thomas Mann's novel (*Doctor Faustus*, 1943–1947), but also a detailed musicological analysis. As we know, since 1932, Hauer would press a stamp on documents next to his signature testifying to his authorship of the twelve-tone technique. Hauer's text on the stamp read: *The spiritual father and (in spite of many imitators!) still the only true master and connoisseur of twelve-note music* (Elder 2008: 200).

We must attest yet another fact that the imitator (Schönberg) closely followed Hauer's creative and theoretical experiments. Thus, in a letter to Hauer of 1 December 1923, Schönberg suggested collaboration in writing a joint book, setting out their ideas, raising a factual dispute, and highlighting differences in opinion. As we know, Hauer approached the series in his theoretical research and work through studying the techniques of tropes (*Tropentechnik*) and of 10–12 tone "building blocks" (*Bausteintechnik*). The paradigm of the series formed by him was supplemented with other essential principles of the dodecaphonic technique by Fritz Heinrich Klein, since in Hauer's system, the transposition of the series and transpositions of the contrapuntal origin were not applied (Perle 1991: 145). The latter technological manipulations (the R, I, IR principles) and, perhaps, unsurpassed examples of the construction of the twelve-tone series were found in

<sup>1</sup> Hauer's first theoretical work *Über die Klangfarbe* [About Tone-Color] (1918) led to the above-mentioned fundamental *Vom Wesen des Musikalischen* [On the Essence of Music], 1920. Those were followed by other theoretical works: *Deutung des Melos: eine Frage an die Künstler und Denker unserer Zeit* [Interpretation of the Melos] (1922) and *Die Lehre von den Tropen* [Teachings on the Tropes], Theoretische Schriften, Band 2 (1925).

<sup>2</sup> One composition by Hauer was performed in 1919, in a concert of the Society for Private Musical Performances (*Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*), organized by Schönberg. There are hardly enough arguments to recognise the concerts of the Society a genuine reconnaissance place for the experiments of the early 20th century new music. Based on Guittart Henk's research, the greatest number of the compositions performed there belonged to Max Reger (23) and Claude Debussy (16). As proved by the ratios of the performed works (Reger – Debussy – Hauer), the most radical innovations had not yet been discerned, or Schönberg envied them (Henk 2015).

Klein's opus *Die Maschine: Eine extonale Selbstsatire* for two pianos (1921) and in his letters to Alban Berg. According to Arnold Whittall (2008: 68), that was the first composition in which the twelve-tone series sounded in the forms of inversions and retrograde as well as transpositions.

Schönberg, meanwhile, never theoretically declared a search for the idea of twelve-tone music; he carried out such a search in his compositional work, however, it was not ever made public<sup>3</sup>. Schönberg's being in the stage of a search for new music was confirmed by the fact that, during the first two years of existence of the Society for Private Musical Performances, Schönberg did not allow any of his works to be performed in its concerts<sup>4</sup>. In his self-assigned "method of composing with twelve tones" [*Komposition mit zwölf Tönen*] (Schönberg 1975: 213), Schönberg took over and synthesised the ideas of Hauer and Klein and further systematised the technique of dodecaphony. He formulated the rules of the series application which helped to overcome the impression of tonality (to avoid consonances – sequences of the thirds and the sixths). The concerts of the Society for Private Musical Performances and the dates of its activities (29 December 1918 to 5 December 1921) can be seen as more than an exhibition of works by composers "with their own name and face" (Schönberg's wording) – "from Mahler to the present" (Alban Berg's wording)<sup>5</sup>. The events that took place in the background of the Society's activities can be deciphered simultaneously as its organiser's (Schönberg's) period of exploring and systematising the ideas of atonal music composition. The dates of the Society's existence can be defined by two events, from the law of the series established by Hauer to Schönberg's determination in 1921 to write his first dodecaphonic composition, *Suite for Piano op. 25* (completed in 1923). The relevant canon of the dodecaphonic technique was defined by the essence of the method: the validity of the twelve-tone series and the principle of non-repeating tones in the development of the opus material; the dodecaphonic technique included also the forms of the paradigmatic series application (I, R, IR) and transpositions. The 100th anniversary of Eduardas Balsys calls for reconsideration of his relationship with dodecaphony.

### **The context of composer Eduardas Balsys' debut in Lithuania**

The steps of the renewal of Lithuanian music and the compositional work of Balsys' generation in the broader context of music development can be described at the time as a period of the "tectonic break" in the music of the USSR. It was specifically in the early 1960s (1960–1961) that the renewal in Soviet music writing started. That was the beginning of testing the twelve-tone technique in the pro-Western part of the USSR (the pioneers included Russian Andrei Volkonski, Estonian Arvo Pärt, Vitaly Godziacki and Valentin Silvestrov in the Ukraine, Benjaminas Gorbulskis in Lithuania, Julius Gaidelis in Boston, etc.). The lingering official art discourse of the time and the delayed, historically inadequate period of the incorporation of dodecaphony into composers' scores determined the specificity of the context. The process can be viewed from very different angles.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the events in music composing renewed the composers' desire to deconstruct the faceless monolith of the "socialist realism" music. Ona Narbutienė called the decade of Balsys' debut in dodecaphony (1962–1971) as an especially significant *return to the positions of the 1930s, when diverse stylistic trends were differentiated in Lithuanian music. <...> Through following the stylistic break in the early 1960s, Lithuanian music escaped from the trap* (a uniform manner of music writing, with the same clichés applied in every case – G. D.), *assimilated innovations extremely quickly, and caught up with the lost time* (Narbutienė 1999: 128).

We have to note one fundamental difference between the states of Lithuanian music culture in the 1930s and the 1960s. During the Soviet era, the "factory-type order" (the concept of Vytautas Kavolis, see: Kavolis 1996; 1998) of culture regulation came into force in Lithuania. Art was ideologically constructed and supervised, and three main factors regulating the culture of the USSR were officially in force: communist ideology + cultural policy + the official "method of art and criticism", or the canon of socialist realism (socialist culture had to be socialist in content and national in form). Although art functionaries would have found it difficult to decipher the content of this formula, the imprints of its operation on the "face" of the USSR culture were

<sup>3</sup> During the first two years of the Society's existence, Schönberg did not allow any of his compositions to be performed in its concerts.

<sup>4</sup> At the concerts of the Society, compositions by Ferruccio Busoni, Richard Strauss, Béla Bartók, Alban Berg, Claude Debussy, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Igor Stravinsky, Anton Webern, Gustav Mahler, Maurice Ravel, Max Reger, Erik Satie, etc. were performed. They were selected by Schönberg himself or by the so-called Performance Director (*Vortragsmeister*) appointed by him: those included Berg, Webern, Benno Sachs, Rudolf Kolisch, Erwin Stein, and Eduard Steuermann.

<sup>5</sup> Berg wrote to his wife about a wide repertoire of the concerts (see: Carner 1969: 365–375 also Malcolm 2008: 57–58).

aply summarised by American philosopher of art Boris E. Groys. Groys characterised the content and state of the art of socialist realism by several specific features: the persecution of any “formalist” art, resulting in the concept of total art whose authorship was ascribed to Stalin and in the syndrome of a mature post-historical culture (Groys 1992). The pressure of ideological supervision led to long-term stagnation and backwardness of the music culture of the USSR.

As for Lithuania and Balsys’ music, it must be admitted that some dates of Lithuanian music modernisation were marked by the dates of his compositions. Thus, Algirdas Jonas Ambrazas stated that the earliest, and probably the most radical, changes in music language in Lithuania manifested themselves in Balsys’ Concerto No. 2 for violin and orchestra (1958). In the history of Lithuanian music, the year 1958 was marked by another significant event: Julius Juzeliūnas’ opera *The Rebels* was banned almost before the premiere “due to ideological mistakes”. In Western Europe, however, the processes of music modernisation took a completely different direction. As it is known, in 1958, John Cage came to the citadel of serialism, the International Darmstadt Summer Course. He caused universal controversy of the compositional mindset, reflected in various cross-sections of composition trends. That took place in Darmstadt in 1958, in Cage’s “sobering” lecture *Indeterminacy*. Cage’s debut<sup>6</sup> ended Darmstadt’s serial avant-garde – an era of exploring and systematising musical material – and opened a post-serialist perspective of avant-garde music (as Gianmario Borio (1993) called it in his dissertation). To put it more simply, Cage’s radicalism freed material from rational coercion and offered the principles of improvisational randomness. Cage’s most important theses were the assertion that improvisation was liberation and a condition for one’s own self and, vice versa, order was coercion. Indeterminacy, the ability to perform a work in various ways<sup>7</sup>, was described by Cage as liberation and a condition for one’s own, and, vice versa, ordered procedures in musical composition were called coercion.

The syndrome of “periods missing each other” in music composition in the West and the USSR shall stand out if we compare what was perceived as “new” in the art of sound in Darmstadt environment and in Balsys’ conception of music modernisation. It would seem that there was not yet any “common denominator” between those conceptions in the 1950s. For Cage, it was moving away from the structural euphoria of the post-war serialism, while for Balsys, it was moving away from the romantic Tchaikovskian style that prevailed in music writing during his doctoral studies at the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory in Leningrad (1950–1953). The so-called stylistic turn of Balsys’ music in 1958 was mainly associated to the modernisation of the relation with Lithuanian folk art (interpretation of the folk song *Oi teka, bėga* [(The Western Star) is Rising, is Moving] in the rhythm of rumba in Concerto No. 2 for violin)<sup>8</sup> and was not yet associated with the incorporation of the dodecaphonic technique into his work. However, Balsys carried out music modernisation experiments in less vigilantly government-supervised film music.

The beginning of the unofficial race of Lithuanian composers in terms of contact with dodecaphony was won by Benjaminas Gorbulsis, who created the first twelve-tone series, a manifestation of the “bourgeois compositional technique” in Lithuania, in 1959. In the second movement, *Grief*, of his *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*, the twelve-tone theme and the dissonant sound of the slow movement contrasted strongly with the tonal edge movements of the Concerto (*Flight* and *Humor*). However, it would not be correct to call the second movement of Gorbulsis’ *Concerto* “dodecaphonic”<sup>9</sup>. Merely twelve non-repeating semi-tones on the theme of *Grief* were arranged, no special constructive efforts were demonstrated, there were

<sup>6</sup> It was the first lecture of Cage in 1958, while the second, *Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in Instrumental and Electronic Music*, took place in Brussels. Stockhausen attended both of them and immediately made arrangements to have the material published; it was published in the *Die Reihe* journal, No. 5 (1959).

<sup>7</sup> In elaborating and differentiating the meanings of the term, a distinction was made between *indeterminacy of composition* and *indeterminacy of performance*, etc. (Simms 1986: 357).

<sup>8</sup> Feliksas Bajoras criticised the modern folk style of Balsys’ Concerto for Violin No. 2 (1958), recognised by musicologists (Ambrazas, Narbutienė, etc.), in a manner typical of him: *What is genuinely Lithuanian in it? It is only the melody. But such melodies can be found in Arabian folklore as well. The harmony is academic (which precisely binders the development of a unique culture). The rhythm is that of rumba. Livontas’ performance only highlights these details.* Quoted in: Feliksas Bajoras. *Autobiografija* [Autobiography], (Bajoras 2002: 55).

<sup>9</sup> In the debut of dodecaphony in Lithuania, in the second movement (*Grief*) of Benjaminas Gorbulsis’ *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*, a series of 12 non-repeating tones is exhibited in the upper voice at the beginning of the second movement, afterwards treated in a non-strict (amateurish) way. The series is “accompanied” by subvoices derived from the initial segment (*b/flat-d-c-g; a/flat-d-c-g*) and sustained “pedaling”. The series spreads through orchestral parts in an original and transformed forms, polytonal chords take effect, drifting towards the twelve-tone technique. The series was repeated in the middle episode of the third movement (*Humor*).

no technological manipulations nurtured by Klein, and the theme sounded in an atonal harmonic field. Julius Gaidelis, a student of Juozas Gruodis, moved closer towards the dodecaphonic technique exercises in his composition *Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Bassoon*, composed in Boston in 1961. In the score, he wrote a 12-tone series consisting of repeating segments<sup>10</sup>. In the first half of the series, he possibly even cryptographically signed in musical letters: G-A-I (as)-D-E-(es)-S (*as* and *es* as “i” equivalents), and the tritone in the centre of the series seemed to instantly spell Gaidelis’ name. However, Gaidelis’ *Trio* is more reminiscent of dodecaphony exercises, when the different modifications of the series and the original one sound in a contrapuntal way.

The causes of the syndrome of “periods missing each other” in different worlds are well known. As early as in the 1950s through 1960s, dodecaphony in the USSR was without hesitation labelled as a “bourgeois” manifestation and persecuted. The extent to which the official authorities perceived the threat of art modernisation to the socialist camp people can be demonstrated by the adjectives used by the Secretary General of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev in his widely advertised meetings with writers and artists. Careful choice of words neglected, from the Kremlin rostrum, Khrushchev called them “art formalists”, “abstractionists”, “ideological saboteurs”, and even “pederasts” (Дзюба 2013). The initiative “from above” soon resonated in many Soviet republics, in the meetings on ideological issues of creative intelligentsia and ideological workers, focusing also on the younger generation of composers and musicians.

In the evaluation of a whole complex of cultural and historical circumstances, it is necessary to emphasise that, in Lithuania and the USSR in the 1960s, the twelve-tone dodecaphonic technique was euphorically perceived by modernist composers as a Western compositional system. It was coveted as a tool for refining the mindset, for mastering algorithms for a new “order” of musical parameters, and for stimulation of reflection on the 20th century modern music composition. The modern trend composers in the Baltic States and the USSR often associated dissonant sound with the opposition to the primitivised stylistics of Soviet music under the auspices of the socialist realism ideology, with a dissident attitude to the ideology of Soviet culture, and in the Baltic countries, also with the hostility to occupation. However, the official discourse in the culture of the USSR was very different from the prevailing attitude in the music community of the Baltic States.

A conference under the emblematic title *On Real and Supposed Innovation in Contemporary Music*, held in Moscow at the end of December 1965, turned into an arena of collision between art functionaries and composers. The official speeches were dominated by a negative ideologised reflection on dodecaphonic music: emphasis was placed on the “total usurpatory nature”, epigonialism, imitational copying, abstract thought, “music manufacture”, formalism, and “militant craftsmanship”. From its rostrum, Ambrazas<sup>11</sup> proposed a bolder look into the future and a search for new, as yet unused means of expression. When speaking about the works of Lithuanian composers (Gorbulskis, Algimantas Bražinskas, Balsys, and Vytautas Barkauskas), Ambrazas presented compromise examples of the application of dodecaphonic means and socialist-realism ways of “decontamination”. He argued that those composers, while taking over elements of dodecaphony, introduced modal supports, rhythms, intonations, and genre dance elements typical of national folklore. Later, an editorial article (apparently by Leo Mazel, a member of the then editorial board) in the *Soviet Music* (Советская музыка) journal made a comment on the version of Lithuanian dodecaphony as presented by Ambrazas. The level of modernity of Lithuanian compositions had been diagnosed with a crushing, but quite correct conclusion: *As we can see, our Lithuanian colleagues have nothing to do with dodecaphony as a system* (С трибуны 1966, No. 5: 27). The official conclusion of the conference was summed up by Viktor Zuckerman: *A laboratory-type experiment must remain a personal property of the composer, without a claim on public propaganda* (С трибуны 1966, No. 6: 19).

### **Balsys’ relation with dodecaphony as a compositional ideology and technique**

Eduardas Balsys is known to have become acquainted with dodecaphony in 1962. During his visit to conductor Piero Bellugi at his home in Florence, Balsys was demonstrated compositions of Bruno Bartalozzi (Narbutienė 1999: 102). At the time, the acquaintance with a systemic twelve-tone chromatic scale (dodecaphony) seemed a promising prospect for Balsys. However, dodecaphony had to be studied not only from theoretical sources, but also from relevant scores, its technological rituals had to be tested, the relationship

<sup>10</sup> In the first part of the series, a sequential transposition of the fifth PCS 3–1; in the second half, two segments 3–4 (the second being IR of the first one). Gaidelis composed the monocycle using the transformations of the series (I, R, IR, etc.).

<sup>11</sup> LLMA, f. 305, ap. 1, b. 501, l. 4–12.

with the individuality evaluated, and it had to be interpreted in the field of one's own musical identity. The new universal creative practice and a method with the reputation of a "forbidden fruit" only increased its attractiveness and marked it with a flavour of resistance. Although during the acquaintanceship (the 1960s) most Lithuanian composers euphorically received dodecaphony as a Western technique, as early as in the 1960s, and especially in public speeches, Balsys joined its critics and expressed a rather postmodern view. It is highly doubtful that works on the critique of dodecaphony by Th. Adorno (1949), G. Ligeti (1958), L. B. Meyer (1967), and other authors were known in Lithuania. In this context, several questions arise, the first one being: what could Balsys and his colleagues have known about the dodecaphonic method in the mid-20th century?

The "Iron Wall" built in the culture of the USSR and the persecution of "formalist" means of expression greatly complicated the modernisation of Soviet music and the penetration of dodecaphony into Lithuania. Copies of books and records were transported illegally; there was an acute shortage of score samples. Intellectual professional wealth was accumulated by each composer in individually accessible ways. Judging from Balsys' archive donated by his family to the library of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LMTA), he was interested in innovations in the art of music, collected theoretical books, subscribed to journals, and studied regulations of "formalist" techniques. However, the books by Balsys brought to the LMTA Library without compiling a list of them, were incorporated into the library funds, which today makes it difficult to identify the sources of Balsys' studies of dodecaphony (he might have used copies of books). His daughter Dalia Balsytė shared an interesting fact that, while abroad, her father used to spend all the money on books (it was his professional capital!), and he never brought any presents to his family<sup>12</sup>. However, the exhibition dedicated to the composer's centenary *Eduardas Balsys (1919–2019)*, held in the National Gallery of Art on 11 October – 1 December 2019, demonstrated an only book *Arnold Schönberg* donated to Balsys by his Polish colleague Florian Dąbrowski in Poznan on 13 January 1967. The exhibition curator Eglė Juocevičiūtė claimed that no other books on the subject could be found. However, the search for such sources revealed other interesting things.

Vytautas Barkauskas testified to the fact<sup>13</sup> that, in 1963, a delegation of the Lithuanian Composers' Union (Balsys, Bražinskas, and Barkauskas) went to Riga, Tallinn, and Leningrad to establish professional relations with Latvian, Estonian, and Leningrad composers. Each of them received a copy of Ernst Křenek's book *Studies in Counterpoint: Based on the Twelve-Tone Technique (Zwölf-ton-Kontrapunkt-Studien)* (1952) from Arvo Pärt (translated from German in 1966 and distributed by Ambrasas). In the 1960s, a relatively new monograph by George Perle *Serial Composition and Atonality: An Introduction to the Music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern* (1962) was available in Lithuania. The book and the piano score copies of *Wozzeck* were donated to Barkauskas by colleagues in Moscow<sup>14</sup>. Balakauskas and Barkauskas also had Bogusław Schäffer's book *Classics of Dodecaphony (Klasycy dodekafonii)* (1961). Apparently, Messiaen's *The Technique of My Musical Language (La technique de mon langage musical)* (1944) was also available, because as early as in 1966/1967, into the course of *Theoretical Issues of Contemporary Music*, Algirdas J. Ambrasas integrated topics about Bartók's modal thinking, introduced Křenek's twelve-tone counterpoint system, and explored the structural uniqueness of Messiaen's musical language. Moreover, at the end of the 1960s, at the initiative of Ambrasas, a cycle of lectures on the 20th century music composition was organised; the lectures were given by leading Soviet musicians: J. Kholopov, T. Bershadskaya, A. Schnittke, E. Denisov, V. Dernova, and others (Daunoravičienė 2017: 10–45). Those were powerful stimuli for writing music as an alternative to the product of socialist realism, and simultaneously for the renewal of the theoretical discourse. In the socialist camp, studies of the music of Bartók, Stravinsky, Webern, and Messiaen took place and the works of Boulez and Stockhausen were introduced with delay: Western music was already experiencing the "sunset" of avant-garde techniques and the transition to postmodernism.

The interpretation of the relation of Balsys and the twelve-tone technique depends on the approach and the goals of the interpretation. In most cases, the approach is mythologised. It seems that Balsys could have seen the dissonance of twelve-tone compositions from at least three different viewpoints: as listener, com-

<sup>12</sup> From the author's interview with Dalia Balsytė in the autumn of 2019. For the list of Balsys' books stored in the LMTA Library in 2019. Possibly part of the relevant books from Balsys' library were given to his son Audrius Balsys.

<sup>13</sup> From the correspondence between the author and Vytautas Barkauskas: his email of 5 March 2019.

<sup>14</sup> George Perle's book was translated by Laima Katkuvienė, wife of musicologist Donatas Katkus, in Palanga.

poser, and administrator (functionary) of Soviet art. It should come as no surprise that his evaluations were quite different. Although in public speeches he spoke about dodecaphony with reserve, in the closed space of his creative laboratory, on the contrary, he tried to apply its principles, and there his evaluations were not categorically negative. It was clear that Balsys' encounter with dodecaphony made him accept some insights of Th. Adorno. One of them was to the effect that, when dealing with dodecaphony, "music ceased to be expressive" (Adorno 2006: 42–43, 54). Another one was that, as Adorno put it, *By liberating music, it (the dodecaphonic technique – G. D.) shackles it. The subject controls music by basing it on a rational system, but the weight of that system breaks himself* (idem: 54).

Balsys' public statements about dodecaphonic music are again to be interpreted, given at least several circumstances. Their content may have reflected the credentials of the administrative positions held by Balsys (Chairman of the Lithuanian Composers' Union, Executive Secretary of its Board, and Head of the Composition Department)<sup>15</sup>: administrators were obliged to express a position loyal to the government. In addition, in that context (the 1960s through the early 1970s), a creative dispute took place between Balsys and Julius Juzeliūnas on their approaches to music composition and the ways to individualise their compositional systems. Although Balsys felt the need to escape from the established framework of his music writing<sup>16</sup> and used some constructivist means, in public, he repeatedly questioned the purposes of applying the latest techniques. In general, Balsys was skeptical about "cold" music and critical of the rational composition of music. In 1971, from the rostrum of the 6th Congress of the Lithuanian Composers' Union, he declared: *In formal experimentation, non-viable "opera" are born, not beneficial either to the mind or heart*<sup>17</sup>. In such a way, he must have responded to the concept of support tones of his colleague Juzeliūnas (1972), but simultaneously it must be admitted that, by those comments, Balsys resonated with functionaries (*Balsys became conservative due to his long administrative career* (Bajoras 2002: 55)) and with the already postmodernist criticism of the dodecaphonic technique.

In accordance with Rytis Mažulis' systematisation of artists ("either poets or engineers"), Balsys undoubtedly belonged to the first group. He was a melodist by nature. Melody had always been important to him. Once he told his son Audrius: *It is not so difficult to write a very complex composition, it is much more difficult to write a good melody*<sup>18</sup>. It was again one of the answers to the 1960s campaign of composition rationalisation in Lithuania as well as to Juzeliūnas' invitation to view folklore structures from an analytical viewpoint and to treat them as constructive elements of the musical system, thereby underpinning one's own method of composition. Creative attitudes of Balsys contradicted those of his colleague Julius Juzeliūnas and his creative method. The essence of the contradiction between Juzeliūnas and Balsys' ideological attitudes was defined by phrases often repeated by Balsys, such as "dry constructivism", "uncritical use of avant-garde means" versus "spontaneity in the creative process" or "a free approach to art". In music composition, Balsys valued spontaneity and mastery and opposed "the good will of scholars to teach composers to write music" (*I am against "scholarly recipes", even though they alleviate sufferings in the creative process*) (Narbutienė 1999: 175). Meanwhile, Juzeliūnas invited, instead of condemning the manifestations of modern music, to find out what could be seen as positive in them, and especially "to focus on the theoretical analysis of national origins".

Balsys long-term discussion with his colleague Juzeliūnas, whom Balsys referred to as a "slave of schemes" in a private environment, is reminiscent in its own way of the dispute between Valentin Silvestrov and Osvaldas Balakauskas about the essence of music that took place during night hearings in Kiev. What is music – the beauty of pure structures (Hanslick's position) or an eloquent and expressive verbal substance (Silvestrov's position)? Although, according to Balsys' declarations, it seemed that the dodecaphonic technique did not respond to the sound of his own inner music, he did not give it up in his music writing. The relation of Balsys with the modern 20th century twelve-tone compositional technique was apparently predetermined by his choice as an artist. Audrius Balsys testified that the criterion of modern music composition for Balsys was the answer to the question: "is it interesting or not"<sup>19</sup> to analyze and to listen to such music?" The word "modern"

<sup>15</sup> In 1954–1962, Balsys was Executive Secretary of the Board of the Lithuanian Composers' Union; in 1962–1971, its Chairman; and in 1960–1984, he was Head of the Composition Department of the Lithuanian State Conservatoire.

<sup>16</sup> Balsys' expressive confession of 1980 reflects the state of intensive search. He wrote: *Thoughts strive to conquer the unknown spaces, especially when we are surrounded by numerous innovations not only in the field of music, but also in science and technology. I wish to say something new and fresh. And then I start looking for something new* (Balsys 1980; Narbutienė 1999: 102).

<sup>17</sup> Verbatim record of Balsys' presentation – report at the 6th Congress of the Lithuanian Composers' Union (LLMA, f. 21, ap. 1, b. 396).

<sup>18</sup> From the LRT radio programme *Musical Pastiche*, 01-11-2019. Jūratė Katinaičė interviews Audrius Balsys.

<sup>19</sup> From the author's interview with Audrius Balsys, 10 April 2020.

was a mark of novelty to him in his field, and the opening up new harmonic potential in his music writing, which he acknowledged as intuitive work, was “interesting”. Balsys was apparently inspired to take an interest in the twelve-tone “formalist” technique in the early 1960s not only by curiosity, but also by “creative inertia, clichés, dry academism, gray craftsmanship, and a superficial approach to mastery” in the socialist realism music of his colleagues, acknowledged by Balsys as “also harmful to true artistic creation” (LLMA, f. 21, ap. 1, b. 396). Thus, he was not totally indifferent to the knowledge of that technique.

Balsys studied the technique of dodecaphony, the scores of Berg’s operas, and the formalised order of the twelve-tone technique selectively and cautiously applied them in his dodecaphonic period works (*Dramatic Frescoes* (1965), the oratorio *Don’t Touch the Blue Globe* (1969), and the opera *The Journey to Tilsit* (1980)). He described the form of dodecaphony applied by himself as follows: *I accept the principles of free dodecaphony <...> The series must flow from an emotional need* (Vyliūtė 1980: 38). A free dodecaphonic technique in Balsys’ work meant the exposition of a series and subsequent flexible procedures (rejection of the dogma of non-repeating tones and a rather free atonal harmonic vertical). The conception of Balsys’ dodecaphony was affected by the priority of expressive thematicism and its consistent development, professed until the end of his creative career. As testified by Balsys’ son, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven remained ideals to Balsys. He appreciated Tchaikovsky for his melodicism, musical fantasy, and mastery (*The Nutcracker*) and claimed that “art must hypnotise”<sup>20</sup>. He noted, *I sense titanic work of thought in Beethoven’s music. When one studies his drafts or notebooks, one finds a lot of sketches, variants, and musical ideas, both brilliant and banal* (Mikšytė 1973).

It is important to note that the freer twelve-tone forms were more coherently harmonised with the conflict-based dramaturgy, further recognised by Balsys, and Beethoven–Strauss’s composition development principles, which Balsys also did not intend to abandon. He was attracted by the idea of gradual transformation of Beethoven–Schönberg’s integral primary element (*Kopfmotiv*, basic idea, *Grungestalt*, *Modell*) and the principle of generativism of the basic structure. In the process of music writing, Balsys did not apply or accept the ideas of Webernian structural constructivism.

The nature of the relation with the dodecaphonic paradigm was also determined by Balsys’ conception of the form dramaturgy, which was close to Strauss’s dramatism (*sometimes one needs a clear construction, however, a free form for laying out the idea. As I want the idea to be nimble, I bypass all rules*) (Vyliūtė 1980: 38). Balsys composed by following the conception of creating an organic musical form. In many cases, his dodecaphonic technique modulated into atonal music, where the intonation potential of the series underpinned the thematicism of such opuses, exhibited in a melodic form. As we shall see later, the basic segments of the series were treated by Balsys as if they were Beethoven’s *Kopfmotifs*, this time arising from the atonal thematicism of the series. In the potential of the twelve-tone technique, Balsys saw the generative potentials of what Schönberg called the “basic structure” (the motif), the “least common multiple”, and Th. W. Adorno, “the most important figure”.

Apparently, Balsys also evaluated the dissonant sound from an audience’s point of view and was not sure whether one would like such music at all. Together with listeners of dodecaphonic opuses, Balsys was likely to have expressed the following evaluative insights: *Only an analysis, but not the listening experience, allows one to reveal how the themes of the series or their tones correlate. It is difficult to listen to such sets of sounds, it is not easy to enjoy them, and it is not easy to discern a melody...*<sup>21</sup> Balsys was concerned with the emotional suggestiveness of the composition, the audience’s response to it, and certain hedonism.

### Concluding remarks

The case of Balsys’ dodecaphony can be examined in various aspects: both as a diagnosis of the cultural field and as a counterpoint from the periods missing each other – elementary dodecaphonic exercises and the transition of the avant-garde to postmodernism. Ultimately, the period of dodecaphony in Lithuanian music can be seen as an opportunity, opened up in the 1960s and 1970s, to shorten the shadow of the “delayed culture” through overstepping the remnants of the disintegrated tonality. The conceptualisation of those aspects can highlight something in common for the past, present, and future of our musical culture. I shall direct my research towards the fourth reflection and try to interpret the above-mentioned complex mix of problems through the case of Balsys’ dodecaphony.

<sup>20</sup> From the author’s interview with Audrius Balsys, 10 April 2020.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

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*Translated by Laimutė Servaitė*

[A continuation of the article in the next issue]

## **Eduardo Balsio dodekafonija ir jos kontekstai**

### **Santrauka**

Reflektuojant Eduardo Balsio gimimo (1919) jubiliejaus šimtmetį ir dodekafoninės technikos įsteigimo Josefo Matthias Hauerio opuse Nr. 19 „Nomos“ (1919) šimtmetį, straipsnyje gvildenama Balsio dodekafoninė kūryba. Kompozitoriaus nuostata šios technikos požiūriu nebuvo vienalytė. Jis dairėsi naujovių muzikos mene, kaupė teorines knygas, prenumeravo žurnalus ir studijavo „formalistinių“ technikų reglamentą. Tačiau Balsio kūrybinei prigimčiai buvo artimesnis taisyklių nesuvaržytas kūrybinis polėkis, o „sausas“ racionalios prigimties dodekafonijos technika jo vidinės muzikos skambesio neatliepė. Neatsitiktinai dar dodekafonijos atėjimo į Lietuvą laikotarpiu (XX a. 7 deš.) Balsys prisijungė prie jos kritikų, tačiau viešam oponavimui priešpriešino kompozicinius bandymus savo kūrybinėje laboratorijoje. Laisva dodekafonine technika, kuri artėjo prie 12-tonės technikos, Balsys komponavo savo etapinius kūrinius („Dramatinės freskos“ (1965), oratorija „Nelieskite mėlyno gaublio“ (1969), opera „Kelionė į Tilžę“ (1980) ir kt.). 12-tonių serijų intonacinis potencialas grindė šių opusų tematizmą, serijų fragmentai persmelkė svarbiausias instrumentines ar vokales partijas. Serijų segmentų plėtojimas „Dramatinėse freskose“ ir oratorijoje greičiau priminė laisvą *Kopfmotive* ar bazinių struktūrų plėtojamą atonalioje terpėje, t. y. nebuvo sukaustytas griežto dodekafonijos technikos reglamento.

Straipsnyje keliami hipotezė, kad susipažinęs su teoriniais dodekafonijos darbais (Ernsto Křeneko, George'o Perle'o, Bogusławo Schöfferio ir kt.) Balsys, kaip ir daugelis lietuvių kompozitorių, stokojo šia technika sukurtų partitūrų pavyzdžių. 7-ajame dešimtmetyje jis greičiausiai dar nebuvo susipažinęs su klasikiniais dodekafoniniais opusais (pvz., A. Weberno kūriniiais), kurie būtų atskleidę griežtus serijų funkcionavimo kompozicijoje reikalavimus. Santykis su dodekafonija ir serijų funkcionavimo formos ėmė keistis apie 1978 m., kai rengdamasis kurti operą Balsys iš Maskvos pasiskolino ir savo metodu (perrašydamas ranka ir tyrinėdamas) išanalizavo A. Bergo operų („Wozzeck“ ir „Lulu“) partitūras. Analizė pakeitė dodekafonijos traktuotę 12-tonės serijos plėtojimo požiūriu, kas tapo akivaizdu jo operos „Kelionė į Tilžę“ partitūroje.