

## Final Chords as a Vivid Reflection of Eduardas Balsys' Creative Work: *Concerto for Violin Solo*

**Abstract.** In the context of Lithuanian music, the oeuvre of Eduardas Balsys are distinguished by striking compositions of large form for big ensembles of performers, which are noted for their persuasiveness, masterful orchestration and for the style of music relevant at the time. They include a ballet, oratorio, opera, Dramatic Frescoes for violin, piano and orchestra, two concertos for violin and orchestra, and many other significant compositions that are firmly established in many performers' repertoire. It is symbolic and at the same time paradoxical that his last composition is for violin solo. It is the culmination of creative thought that makes the most of the instrument, a fine example of a fruitful collaboration between a creator and a performer, and another sign of a creative shift towards neoclassicism. The goal of the article is to reveal the circumstances and creative context of Balsys' Concerto for violin solo.

**Keywords:** concerto for violin solo, Eduardas Balsys, Lithuanian music, sonata for violin solo.

### Introduction

"Balsys' three concertos for violin seem to reflect the main stages of his life and creative work. The First concerto for violin and orchestra is a romantic flight of youth, the second is a harmonious fullness of life and maturity and the third concerto is a monologue of the wisdom accumulated during life, the work of a master, the composer's swan song ..." (Narbutienė 1999: 162). His last work, Concerto for Violin Solo (1984), won the recognition of violinists for its mastery, expression and creative suggestiveness. It was chosen as the object of this research while the goal of the article is to reveal the features of Balsys' music<sup>1</sup> in the concerto, to link it with the Lithuanian tradition of violin concertos and the international context of compositions for violin solo.

### Intentions

The emergence of this work was determined by several circumstances. One of the most significant is the composer's collaboration with the best Lithuanian violinists. "Aleksandras Livontas<sup>2</sup> has played all of Balsys' works for violin, he loved them very much and constantly challenged Balsys to write something else" (Olga Šteinbergaitė; Narbutienė 1999: 377). It was Livontas who performed the first two concertos for violin and orchestra. After his death, the composer promised to write another violin concerto in his memory. The creative process took time, but the intention was noticeable in Balsys' utterances and letters:

"What I will write – probably a third concerto for violin and orchestra. Raimundas Katilius is a great violinist of our republic, a laureate of the International Violin Competition in Montréal, and I want to write for him something nice" (from a letter to his brother Leopoldas, 29 October 1980; Narbutienė 1999: 322).

"I am working. I am writing a third concerto for violin and orchestra. One third has already been written. I hope to complete it before the New Year. We have a good violinist Raimundas Katilius, he keeps challenging me, asks me to hurry. I will dedicate this concerto to him" (from a letter to his brother Leopoldas, 17 October 1984; Narbutienė 1999: 327).

According to violinist Raimundas Katilius<sup>3</sup>, "Balsys was thinking of writing a third concerto for many years. He was interested in more recent literature, I supplied him with notes and recordings by Bartók, Szymanowski, and other authors" (Narbutienė 1999: 381). Narbutienė also wrote about his thorough prepara-

<sup>1</sup> Eduardas Balsys (1919–1984), one of the most famous Lithuanian composers and composition teachers, who had a particularly strong influence on the development of Lithuanian music from the 1950s to the 1970s. In 1950 he graduated from the Lithuanian Conservatory in composition, and in 1953 he completed his postgraduate studies at the Leningrad Conservatory. From 1953 he taught at the Lithuanian Conservatory (now the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre); from 1960 to 1984 he was the head of the Composition Department. He created works of various major genres, and has trained several dozen composition students.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandras Livontas (1920–1974), a violinist and educator; studied at the Odessa Conservatory in 1937–1941; in 1944 he graduated from the Moscow Conservatory (David Oistrakh's class); from 1945 he taught at the Lithuanian Conservatory. He prepared many solo programs and many solo premieres of works by Lithuanian composers.

<sup>3</sup> Raimundas Katilius (1947–2000), Lithuanian violinist and pedagogue; in 1970 he graduated from the Moscow Conservatory (Igor Bezrodny's class), in 1972 he undertook his postgraduate studies there. In 1971–1975 he played the first violin of the Moscow Philharmonic Quartet. From 1975 he taught at the Lithuanian Conservatory. He was the first to perform and edit some works for violin by Lithuanian composers.

tions: “The composer prepared for this work for a very long time – he carefully studied violin concertos from Paganini to Bartók. He wrote various examples of playing the violin in his beautiful, calligraphic handwriting” (Narbutienė 1999: 162).

The concerto was supposed to be for violin and orchestra. According to Katilius, “Balsys spoke a lot about his idea, the orchestra’s interpretation. He mentioned various variants – one movement could be without violins, fugue maybe only with the percussion. But these were only projects, and when I performed two fully completed movements of the Concerto in Druskininkai, he was quite satisfied and considered the possibility of leaving the work without an orchestra ...” (Narbutienė 1999: 382). The composer died soon after that and the concerto was not endorsed by the orchestra. Katilius completed the last two movements of the Concerto and it became a part of his and other violinists’ repertoire<sup>4</sup>.

The strongest inspiration for the appearance of this work came from two violinists – Aleksandras Livontas and Raimundas Katilius, thanks to whom the composer perfectly understood the technical possibilities of the violin. The creative potential of this instrument was demonstrated to Balsys by the opuses of Béla Bartók, Karol Szymanowski and other composers.

### Creative reflexions

The creative style of Eduardas Balsys, like that of many composers, changed over time. Having begun to write music in the neo-romantic style prompted by the historical context (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1), from 1958 he moved towards a more modern, expressive language of music (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 2). By the 1980s, the composer had already reached creative maturity that earned him the recognition of performers and listeners. However, the Concerto for Violin Solo is another pinnacle of his creative work based on new style technological solutions and his mastery. “Maybe it was a new turn in the composer’s path to the maximum purity of style, or maybe at the end of his life he came to the conclusion that everything can be said even with one instrument and a small number of notes?” (Narbutienė 1999: 162).

It was his openness to innovation and new creative challenges that was one of the most important characteristics of Balsys. Having mastered serialism, dodecaphony, atonality and become famous for his knowledge of orchestration, the composer quite unexpectedly turned to neoclassicism. However, the main features are also recognizable in his last work: it is the condensation of themes, expressiveness, variety of solutions in form and original instrumentation.

According to the composer, “the structure of each work’s form as a manifestation of content and its dramaturgy must be new in its own way. Every time that novelty is *terra incognita*, it always intrigues the creator ...” (Narbutienė 1999: 172). This remained important until his last composition, where the author revives traditions of the fugue or chaconne. The search for novelty is also shown by the evolution of three cycles of violin concertos by Balsys:

- Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 (1954; 24'35")<sup>5</sup>: I. *Allegro moderato ed agitato* (11'32"), II. *Andante cantabile e sostenuto* (7'24"), III. *Allegro vivo* (5'39");
- Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 2 (1958; 12'47"): I. Recitative (2'03"), II. Scherzo (3'23"), III. Improvisation (3'52"), IV. Humoresque (3'29");
- Concerto for Violin No. 3 (1984; 9'27"): I. Prelude (*Adagio*, 2'44"), II. Fugue (*Allegro*, 2'16"), III. Chaconne (*Moderato*, 2'57"), IV. Toccata (*Presto*, 1'30").

It is obvious that there was a move towards the condensation of musical material. The composer himself clearly emphasized that essentially it was based on his experience composing concertos: “The principle of my work is to seek a deeper impression by condensing the thought. The second violin concerto is more than half as short as the first, and I seem to have said much more. Quality is selection” (Narbutienė 1999: 172).

On the other hand, Balsys’ style was always expressive. According to musicologist Ona Narbutienė, “music for Balsys is an expression of strong feelings, great passions and contrasting states. Therefore, romantic and expressionist elements are very organically intertwined in his music” (Narbutienė 1999: 182–183). And

<sup>4</sup> The concerto was also played by Ingrida Armonaitė, Domas Juškys, Povilas Bekeris and other Lithuanian violinists.

<sup>5</sup> The duration of the movements is given on the basis of concert recordings of the CD “Eduardas Balsys. Dramatic frescoes” released by the Lithuanian Music Information Center (2003, LMIPCCD022-023).

this trait did not go away over the years. Violin Concerto No. 3 fascinates performers and listeners with the condensed expression of emotions and this is the composer's goal with the first bar of this composition:



Example 1. Eduardas Balsys. Concerto for Violin Solo No. 3, Prelude, mm. 1–4

### Lithuanian context

The violin concerto genre is quite popular in Lithuania. By 1984, Lithuanian composers had composed fifteen violin concertos. In addition to the opuses by Balys Dvarionas, Stasys Vainiūnas and other composers, the three violin concertos by Balsys have become the basis of the national violin repertoire. The most prominent Lithuanian violinists who initiated the appearance of some compositions have contributed a lot to the development of the Lithuanian violin repertoire. The achievements of Lithuanian composers in writing works for violin solo are also noteworthy. Probably the most distinguished work, widely known and established in the repertoire of violinists of the world, is Vytautas Barkauskas' (1931–2020) *Partita for Violin Solo* (1967)<sup>6</sup>.

Balsys' Concerto No. 3 is the only work of this genre for violin solo among the works of Lithuanian composers. However, in the context of Lithuanian music, sonatas for violin solo are quite numerous. By 1984 Antanas Račiūnas (1963), Anatolijus Šenderovas (1971), Jurgis Juozapaitis (1972), Julius Andrejevas (1974) and Vytautas Laurušas (1977) had already written some sonatas. Laurušas' sonata was also written in successful collaboration with the violinist Raimundas Katilius (the work was dedicated to him), and the third final movement of the cycle was a fugue. For Katilius, performing and editing this work was another experience of creative work with the composer, which undoubtedly influenced the preparations for the premiere of Balsys' Concerto.

### Concerto for Violin Solo: Fugue

When writing this piece, Eduardas Balsys always called it a concerto. As already mentioned, he planned to create a third composition of this genre for violin and orchestra. The cooperation with the most prominent Lithuanian violinists gave the composer the competence to create a violin part that requires exceptional virtuosity.

According to the violinist Katilius, the full cycle was to be “framed” by an introduction and postlude (Narbutienė 1999: 160). It is likely that this should have been performed by an orchestra. However, the four movements created – Prelude, Fugue, Chaconne and Toccata – provide a basis for associating this composition with the stylistic trend of neoclassicism.

From a genre point of view, Balsys' Violin Concerto No. 3 is clearly in line with the previous instrumental works whose parts have references to the genre: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 2 (1958) and Symphony-Concerto for organ, winds and percussion (1977, movements: Prelude – Fairy Tale – Interlude – Toccata – Postlude). However, unlike the above-mentioned works, he gave up polystylism in Concerto for Violin No. 3. The third concerto for violin is a neoclassical composition written in the language of modern music, making the most of the technological possibilities of the violin.

“The four movements of the concerto are solid, as if cut out of monolith. And this monolith is the chord of the beginning and end of the Prelude, on which all four movements are based” (Narbutienė 1999: 161). The movements are connected on the principle of contrast. After a contrasting, improvisational first movement, the condensation of the theme based on an expressive Fugue becomes the central movement of the cycle.

Fugue for violin solo already seems in itself a kind of creative paradox, or at least a real challenge for both the creator and the performer. The polyphonic form and texture, polyphony for melodic instrument seem difficult to master. However, solo fugues for melodic instruments were still an expression of the composer's

<sup>6</sup> Gidon Kremer, Raimundas Katilius, Philippe Graffin, Ingrida Armonaitė and others.



Menuhin. The performer described the sonata as a “work of wild contrasts” (Menuhin 1977: 166) and shared his impression: “It was perhaps the most aggressive, brutal music I was ever to play” (Berton 2001: 128).

The above quote mentions that Balsys “studied violin concertos from Paganini to Bartók” when composing his third Concerto. However, the evidence given seems to need to be clarified. It is probable that the Lithuanian composer also studied Bartók’s Sonata. Both Balsys’ Concerto and Bartók’s Sonata are in four movements, these movements have references to the genre (Fugue, Chaconne). In both cycles, Fugue is the second and at the same time the most conceptual part of the work. Here the tradition of the sonata for violin from the Baroque era, more specifically, the structure of the *Sonata da chiesa* can be seen. “The *Sonata da Chiesa* represented a grouping of serious weighty movements, and usually contained a fugue or contrapuntal movement of some sort” (Scott 1929: 49). The cycle is formed in this way in the compositions of Arcangelo Corelli, while Johann S. Bach adopts this solution to the cycle in all three sonatas for violin. The comparison of the movements of the above-mentioned cycle of sonatas in the table reveals obvious parallels of the cycle formation:

Composer, work	Year	Mvt. I	Mvt. II	Mvt. III	Mvt. IV
J. S. Bach. Sonata No. 1, BWV 1001	1720	<i>Adagio</i>	<i>Fugue Allegro</i>	<i>Siciliana</i>	<i>Presto</i>
J. S. Bach. Sonata No. 2, BWV 1003	1720	<i>Grave</i>	<i>Fugue</i>	<i>Andante</i>	<i>Allegro</i>
J. S. Bach. Sonata No. 3, BWV 1005	1720	<i>Adagio</i>	<i>Fugue</i>	<i>Largo</i>	<i>Allegro assai</i>
E. Ysaÿe. Sonata No. 1, op. 27	1923	<i>Grave</i>	<i>Fugato</i>	<i>Allegretto poco scherzoso</i>	<i>Finale, Con brio</i>
B. Bartók. Sonata for violin solo	1944	<i>Tempo di ciaccona</i>	<i>Fugue</i>	<i>Melodia</i>	<i>Presto</i>

Table 1. Solo cycles of sonatas for violin: from J. S. Bach to Bartók

It is obvious that in the twentieth century, the principles of composing a Baroque sonata for violin solo returned to the processes of music composition. They reached Balsys probably through Bartók’s music. As László Vikárius wrote about the influence of Bartók’s Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta and Fugue from Sonata for violin solo, “these exemplary compositions have proved to be inspiring in their novel approach to counterpoint for many later composers” (Vikárius 2006: 416). This can also be said about Fugue from Balsys’ Concerto for Violin No. 3. However, here the issue of a genre arises.

### Issue of a genre

Despite the composer’s original idea when it was planned to create a six-movement concerto cycle, the table above encourages to issue of the reference to the work’s genre. The structure of the implemented part of the original idea shows an obvious similarity of the concerto with the sonata for violin solo genre. The strategy of arranging the movements of the *Sonata da chiesa* that returned together with the ideas of neoclassicism reveals another feature found in the creative work of Balsys – the tendency to combine the features of several genres in one composition.

In addition to polystylistic compounds, there are also cases of combining genres in Balsys’ music. The most obvious example is Symphony-Concerto (1977). The combination of different genres in one composition is found in Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 2, later in Dramatic Frescoes for violin, piano and orchestra, and Symphony-Concerto and Violin Concerto No. 3. Combinations of concerto and symphony genres are more often found in Balsys’ works (the most famous example is Dramatic Frescoes). Balsys’ last composition – Violin Concerto No. 3 – is a new combination: a combination of concerto and sonata genres.

Summarizing the research, we come to the conclusion that Eduardas Balsys’ Concerto for Violin No. 3 is an example of mature twentieth century music for violin solo. Created on the basis of many years of creative experience and the best examples of works for violin, the concerto embraces characteristic features of Balsys’ work: excellent knowledge of instrument possibilities, expressive, moderately modern atonal musical language, contrast-based dramaturgy of the composition; the structure of the parts of the cycle is presupposed by the

stylistics of neoclassicism and the creative traditions of selected music genres. A more detailed analysis of the work and its links with the works of other European composers for violin solo allowed us to rethink the genre referred to in the title. It is the second movement of the Concerto – Fugue – that becomes the key to links with another genre of music – Sonata for violin solo, which reaches back to the Baroque era; the interpretation of the cycle allows us to link it with violin sonatas by J. S. Bach, E. Ysaÿe and especially B. Bartók. This encourages us to see the cohesion of music genres characteristic of Balsys' creative work in the composition, and to see the dichotomy genre – concerto-sonata – in the last work.

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## Paskutiniai taktai – ryškus Eduardo Balsio kūrybos atspindys: Koncertas smuikui solo

### Santrauka

Eduardo Balsio kūryba lietuvių muzikos kontekste išsiskiria ryškiais, didelėms atlikėjų sudėtims skirtais stambių formų kūriniais, pasižyminčiais įtaigumu, meistriška orkestruote ir savalaikiškumu. Tai baletas, oratorija, opera, „Dramatinės freskos“ smuikui, fortepjonui ir orkestrui, du koncertai smuikui ir orkestrui bei daug kitų reikšmingų, atlikėjų repertuare įsitvirtinusių kompozicijų. Simboliška, o kartu ir paradoksalu, kad paskutinis kūrinys – smuikui solo. Tai kūrybinės minties koncentratas, maksimalus instrumento galimybių panaudojimas, kūrėjo ir atlikėjo sėkmingo bendradarbiavimo pavyzdys ir dar vienas kūrybinio posūkio neoklasicizmo link ženklas. Straipsnio tikslas – atskleisti E. Balsio Koncerto smuikui solo sukūrimo aplinkybes ir kūrybinį kontekstą.

Trečiasis koncertas pagal autoriaus sumanymą turėjęs būti smuikui ir orkestrui skirtas 6 dalių kūrinys. Tačiau kompozitorius, bendradarbiaudamas su žymiausiu to meto smuikininku Raimundu Katiliumi, spėjo sukurti tik smuiko partiją ir keturias ciklo dalis (užbaigti kūrinį sutrukdė mirtis). Kūrybos procese Balsys studijavo žymiausių XX a. kompozitorių kūrinius smuikui. Daugiausia įtakos jam turėjo K. Szymanowskio ir ypač B. Bartoko opusai. Bendradarbiavimo su Lietuvos smuikininkais patirtis bei šio kūrinio pirmojo atlikėjo ir redaktoriaus Raimundo Katiliaus profesinis meistriškumas lėmė itin virtuoziško, techniškai sudėtingo, bet kartu ekspresyvaus, atlikėjų ir klausytojų pamėgto kūrinio atsiradimą. Greta V. Barkausko *Partitos* smuikui Balsio Koncertas smuikui solo yra viena ryškiausių XX a. II pusės lietuviškų kompozicijų smuikui.

Koncertas smuikui solo Nr. 3 – tai modernus neoklasicistinio stiliaus kūrinys; konceptualiausia ir ryškiausia jo dalis – *Fuga*. Būtent antroji Koncerto dalis tampa sąsaja su dar vienu muzikos žanru – iš baroko mus pasiekiančia sonata smuikui solo, o ciklo traktuotė sudaro sąlygas Balsio kompoziciją susieti su J. S. Bacho, E. Ysaÿe ir ypač B. Bartoko smuiko sonatomis. Tai skatina kūrinį žvelgti Balsio kūrybai būdingą muzikos žanrų sanglaudą, o paskutinėje kompozicijoje – ir žanrinę dichotomiją: koncertas-sonata.