

Compositional Strategies in the Field of Instrumentation of M. K. Čiurlionis' *Miške*

Abstract. M. K. Čiurlionis's symphonic poem *Miške* is one of the most significant orchestral compositions of the beginning of the 20th century to the geographic region of the Baltic Sea. While a set of musicological treatises deal with formal, thematic and motivic aspects of his works, the finesses in instrumentation of his orchestral oeuvre remained largely unexplored.

The aim of this paper is to look at the design of the main motifs in his symphonic poem *Miške* from a music-analytical perspective. The following aspects are presented in detail: instrumentation of the melody line, octave doublings of the melody line within a section, instrumentation of reoccurring motifs, as well as the participation of the low strings and the brass section in the performance of the melody.

This paper shows in detail that there is a further layer of sound-organization, which deals with the instrumentation of the several motifs of *Miške*. The illustration of the complete tone-colour constellations of a reoccurring motif in tabular form and the description of those constellations through symbols enable us to compare the early symphonic works of Čiurlionis and other symphonic poems of the same period of other geographic areas of Europe. Both similarities and unique features between Čiurlionis and Sibelius are being revealed in terms of instrumentation.

Keywords: symphonic poem, instrumentation, Čiurlionis, *Miške*, Sibelius.

Introduction

Mikalojus K. Čiurlionis occupies a special place in the European music history of the 19th and 20th century. He is not only the national composer of Lithuania, but he also became a highly innovating painter towards the end of his life. This is an almost unique example of an artist, who reached the highest artistic level in both disciplines.¹

While a set of musicological treatises deal with formal, thematic and motivic aspects of his symphonic poems,² the finesses in instrumentation of his orchestral oeuvre remain largely unexplored. The aim of this paper is to look at the design of the main motifs in his symphonic poem *Miške* from a music-analytical perspective.³ The following aspects are presented in detail: instrumentation of the melody line, octave doublings of the melody line within a section, instrumentation of reoccurring motifs, as well as the participation of the low strings and the brass section in the performance of the melody.

Furthermore, Čiurlionis' *Miške* is compared to other symphonic poems of the same period of other geographic areas of Europe,⁴ in order to determine similarities and to highlight the unique features of *Miške*.

Čiurlionis' second symphonic Poem *Jūra* was largely revised and re-orchestrated by the Lithuanian composer Eduardas Balsys (1919–1984). After closer examination of the manuscripts of *Jūra*, which are preserved in the archives of the Nacionalinis M. K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus [The M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum],⁵ it is evident that the final version of *Jūra* by Balsys deviates strongly in several sections from the original version of Čiurlionis'. Unfortunately, there are no Urtext-editions of Čiurlionis' *Miške*⁶ and *Jūra*, something which renders a potential comparison between the two works problematic. Balsys modified the instrumentation of several motifs of *Jūra*. In this sense, the comparison in the field of instrumentation of the modern scores of *Miške* and *Jūra* would have been partly a comparison between Čiurlionis and Balsys.

¹ In his analytical approach on Čiurlionis' symphonic poems, Stefan Keym (2009: 8–28) tries to compare landscape painting with the musical form of Čiurlionis' orchestral works.

² Among others: Ambrasas (2000: 6–15), Keym (2009: 8–28) and Landsbergis (1986: 60–64).

³ A copy in electronic form of the manuscript of *Miške*, which was kindly provided by the staff of the Nacionalinis M. K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus, serves as a template for this musicological article.

⁴ For example: J. Sibelius' early symphonic works.

⁵ The following link of the homepage of the Nacionalinis M. K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus (https://www.limis.lt/detali-paieska/perziura/-/exhibit/preview/50000011748069?s_id=frmRc5N3NXA933tX&cs_ind=186&cvaluable_type=EKSPONATAS) provides information about the various versions of *Jūra* (retrieved on 19. 02. 2020).

⁶ Romaldas Misiukevičius' meticulous edition of Čiurlionis' *Miške* is the first to take into consideration the composer's manuscript (Misiukevičius 2000: 7). Nevertheless, this edition cannot be considered as an Urtext-Edition. It lacks firstly, an additional detailed critical report, where all handwritten entries on the manuscript are documented, and secondly, it considers the modern edition of 1975 as a main source and not the manuscript of the composer.

Main motif of *Miške*

In their musicological articles, Algirdas Ambrazas (2000: 11) and Stefan Keym (2009: 26) provide information on the large-scale form of *Miške*. Vytautas Landsbergis (Landsbergis 1986: 59–61) even uses semantic notions to describe the various sections of this musical work. The motif of Bar 8 performed by the first clarinet (Exp. 1) is described by all authors as the main motif of *Miške*. This motif occurs numerous times⁷ throughout the entire work in several tone-colour constellations. Furthermore, it is very often slightly modified in terms of rhythm.

In order to obtain tangible research results on the instrumentation of this motif for the entire symphonic poem, it would be of fundamental importance to consider all tone-colour constellations from an overarching perspective. This results in a huge amount of data describing the course of the instrumentation, which in turn makes the overview of such processes extremely difficult. It is, therefore, necessary to develop a system to illustrate the course of such tone-colour processes. Two different approaches were developed for this tone-colour analysis:

- Illustration of the tone-colour constellations in tabular form.
- Description of the constellations through symbols.

The abstraction of the sound dispositions in tabular form has the advantage that they clearly display timbral processes. Such tables can provide information about long-term trends in the instrumentation of the melody line that would otherwise remain hidden because of the big size of a symphonic movement.⁸ Furthermore, the description of the tone-colour combinations of the melody line with symbols has the advantage that one can compress all the tone-colour data of a musical work in only a few lines. The review of these processes, however, becomes much more difficult as the data compression increases.

In order to achieve just that, it is necessary to develop a system, which compresses many tone-colour constellations in a clearer way with the help of tables. As a result, long-term tendencies are visible, something which would not be possible through the many different changes in instrumentation from beginning to the end of a movement.

Different colours and symbols are introduced to represent the different places where the melody is doubled and/or octavated. The colour black shows when a melody is performed by an instrument and/or doubled by another one (Exp. 1a), the colour grey signifies the octavating of a melody, the symbol “X” signifies that a melody is played two octaves higher (Exp. 1b) and the symbol “□” that a melody is played three octaves higher.⁹ The colours give no information about the position, but describe the final relation that two melodies have.⁹

Instrument	
Clar. 1	■
Cor. 1	
Cor. 2	
Cor. 3	
Cor. 4	
Vln. 1	
Vln. 2	
Vla.	
Vc.	
Cb.	

Exposition 1a. First appearance of the main motif of *Miške*: partcell (left) and in tabular form (right)

⁷ Bars 8, 14, 20, 31, 33, 38, 46, 48, 53, 59, 86, 89, 94, 95, 114, 130, 137, 139, 142, 154, 196, 197, 198, 200, 202, 206, 208, 211, 223, 276, 283, 289, 293, 308, 310, 317, 319, 321, 323 and 329.

⁸ See also Beran (2004: 212–226).

⁹ See also: Efthimiou (2015: 102–109 and 2017: 310–314).

Instrument	
Fl. 1	X
Fl. 2	■
B. clar.	
Bas. 1	■
Cor. 1	
Cor. 2	
Cor. 3	
Cor. 4	
Vln. 1	
Vln. 2	
Vla.	
Vc.	
Cb.	

Exposition 1b. Second appearance of the main motif of *Miške*: partcell (left) and in tabular form (right)

Exposition 2a lists all tone-colour constellations of the main motif of the exposition¹⁰ of *Miške*. The first row indicates the section of the exposition and the second one the bar number where the motif begins.

Part	A					B				C		D							
Bar	8	14	20	31	33	38	46	48	53	59	86	89	94	95	114	130	137	139	142
Flute 1		X				O										■			X
Flute 2		■				O										■			
Oboe 1				■															
Oboe 2																			X
Cor. E.				■												■			
Clar. 1	■																		
Clar. 2																			
B. Clar.																			
Fag. 1		■																	
Fag. 2									■										
Hn. 1																			
Hn. 2																			
Hn. 3																			
Hn. 4																			
Tp. 1																			
Tp. 2																			
Tbn. 1																			
Tbn. 2																			
Tbn. 3																			
Tuba																			
Vln. 1						X													X
Vln. 2																			
Vla.																			
Vc.																			
Cb.																			

Exposition 2a. The tone-colour constellations of the main motif of *Miške* (expn.) in tabular form

After closer examination of Exposition 2a, the following research results are clear:

- The main motif occurs 19 times in 151 bars.
- Sixteen instruments, from all three groups of the orchestra (woodwinds, brasses and strings), participate in the sound design of the motif;¹¹ therefore, the level of the tone-colour variety of this recurring motif is very high.
- Some more factors contributing to this variety are:
 - There are tone-colour combinations with one (bars 8, 33, 59, 86, 89, 114, 137 and 139), two (20, 31, 53, 94, 95 and 130), three (14, 46 and 48), five (142) and even six (38) instruments.

¹⁰ According to Ambrasas (2000: 13), the large-scale form of *Miške* consists of two parts: exposition (Ekspozicija) and reprise (Repriza). The exposition itself consists of four (A: bars 1–50, B: 51–90, C: 91–113 and D: 114–151), while the reprise consists of three sections (C: 152–198, B: 199–261 and a fusion of sections A and D: 262–342).

¹¹ The rest of the orchestra does not participate yet. Nevertheless, Čiurlionis uses those nine instruments later on in the reprise of the symphonic poem.

- Čiurlionis instrumentates this motif in unison (20, 33 and 133), played in one (14, 46, 48, 53, 94 and 95), two (14 and 142) and even three (33 and 38) octaves.
- There are cases where one instrument plays in octaves (38) and in octaves plus thirds (94).
- Čiurlionis tries to confer on his main motif also long-term tendencies in the instrumentation. In the first 31 bars, woodwinds dominate the tone-design, later on (38–95) strings and at the end (114–137) again woodwinds.
- Astonishingly, there are even correlations between the form of the symphonic poem and the instrumentation of the main motif. The very first tone-colour repetition (Clar. 1) occurs at the beginning of the D-part of the exposition. It is also worth mentioning that the very first constellation consists only of the first clarinet playing the melody.

Considering the fact that *Miške* was his very first complete symphonic attempt, the obtained findings demonstrate the talent and the craftsmanship of this young composer. Not only did he succeed in organizing the numerous entrances of his main motif, but he also was able to create long-term tendencies.

Part	C						B				D/A											
	154	196	197	198	200	202	206	208	211	223	276	283	289	293	308	310	317	319	321	323	329	
Flute 1												X										
Flute 2																						
Oboe 1																						
Oboe 2																						
Cor. E.																						
Clar. 1																						
Clar. 2																						
B.Clar.																						
Fag. 1																						
Fag. 2																						
Hr. 1																						
Hr. 2																						
Hr. 3																						
Hr. 4																						
Tr. 1																						
Tr. 2																						
Tbn. 1																						
Tbn. 2																						
Tbn. 3																						
Tuba																						
Vln. 1																						
Vln. 2																						
Vln.																						
Vc.																						
Ch.																						

Exposition 2b. The tone-colour constellations of the main motif of *Miške* (reprise) in tabular form

Exposition 2b lists all appearances of the main motif played in the final section (reprise) of the symphonic poem. All the characteristics mentioned in the exposition of this occurring motif appear here in the reprise as well and different numbers of instruments (one to thirteen) participate in the sound-design of the motif. This sound-design comprises octavations and dubbings, melodies in thirds, long-term tendencies (brasses: sections C and B / woodwinds: section D/A), avoidance of tone-colour repetitions and correlations between form and instrumentation (first tone-colour repetition takes place at the beginning of a new section: first trombone, bars 211, 276 and 293).

Furthermore, during the reprise Čiurlionis tries not to repeat constellations already used, even though this motif appeared already 19 times before the reprise. This indicates the importance of the instrumentation for the dramaturgical development of the entire musical work.

In summary, this motif dominates motivically the entire symphonic poem. Thereby, a poor sound-design of this reoccurring motif would have led to tone-colour monotony. Already at the beginning of his career, Čiurlionis possessed the compositional skills to vary this motif, not only motivically but also in terms of instrumentation.

Minor motif of *Miške*

After several appearances of the main motif in C-major and E-major (Sect. A: bars 1–48) the symphonic poem shifts to A-minor. The new motif is performed for the first time by the first oboe (bar 55), followed by the two bassoons in unison, octavated by the first horn (bar 56), one bar later by the first clarinet and finally by the bass section of the strings, octavated by the bass clarinet (Exp. 3a).

55

Ob. 1

Clar. 1

B. Clar.

Bas. 1-2

Hn. 1

Bas. 1

Vln. 2

Vc. Cb.

1.

Octave

Exposition 3a. First four entrances of the minor-motif (bars 55–58)

In only four bars, Čiurlionis presents this motif four times, each time with different instruments. Exposition 3b lists the complete appearances of the minor-motif in both parts (expn: upper table / reprise: lower table) of *Miške* in tabular form.

Bar	55	56	57	58	61	62	64	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78
Flute 1																		
Flute 2																		
Oboe 1	■	■																
Cor. E.																		
Clar. 1			■															
B. Clar.				■														
Fag. 1		■																
Fag. 2						■				■						■		
Hn. 1		■																
Tbn. 1																		
Tbn. 3																		
Vln. 1																		
Vln. 2																		
Vla.																		
Vc.																		
Cb.																		

Bar	219	220	221	222	225	226	228	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	241	242	243	244	245	
Flute 1																						
Flute 2																						
Oboe 1	■																					
Cor. E.																						
Clar. 1			■																			
B. Clar.				■																		
Fag. 1																						
Fag. 2																						
Hn. 1																						
Tbn. 1																						
Tbn. 3																						
Vln. 1																						
Vln. 2																						
Vla.																						
Vc.																						
Cb.																						

Exposition 3b. The tone-colour constellations of the minor motif of *Miške* (exposition: upper table / reprise: lower table) in tabular form

In stark contrast to the organization of the tone-colour constellations of the main motif (few repetitions of tone-colours, combinations with several numbers of instruments doubled even in three octaves, melodies in thirds), Čiurlionis follows here a different path:

- There are only two combinations where a melody is performed in two octaves (Exposition: bar 62 / reprise: bar 226).
- Combinations, which are in unison or performed in one octave, dominate both parts of the symphonic poem.
- There are no long-term tendencies in terms of the instrumentation of the minor motif. The woodwinds and the strings play the motif almost constantly.
- There are several sections of the exposition, where both motifs, main and minor, appear. Many of those sections repeat in the reprise, this time with a different harmonic background. While, during the reprise, most of the main motifs are instrumentated in a different way, it is astonishing to see that the majority of the minor motifs are repeated with the same tone-colour; bar 57 correlates with bar 221, bar 58 with 222, etc.

The strategies used by the composer to separate compositionally both motifs are not limited to the parameters of rhythm and harmony. The parameter of instrumentation intensifies this separation, which becomes obvious only in the reprise. In this way, the repetition of an entire part of *Miške* (exposition) in another tonality (reprise) gains a further importance. Ultimately, this is a further indication of the compositional craftsmanship of the young composer.

Apotheosis motif of *Miške*

A further motif, called by Stefan Keym (2009: 26) the “apotheosis motif”, occurs in both the exposition and the reprise. The first appearance of this motif in the second part of *Miške* (bar 262) marks the peak of the whole symphonic poem so far. Čiurlionis takes advantage of a further compositional element, in order to give an impulse to this specific moment of this musical work: the very first entrance of the piccolo-flute occurs at this moment.



Exposition 4a. First entrance of the apotheosis-motif (bars 69–70)

Bar	69	70	71	235	244	248	253	254	255	256	257	263	264	265	267	268	269
Piccolo													○	○			
Flute 1	■	■		■	X		■					X	X	X	■		■
Flute 2	■				■		■					X	X	X	■		
Oboe 1				■				■									■
Oboe 2								■									
Cor. E.										■	■						
Clar. 1				■													
Clar. 2									■								
Tp. 1													■	■	■		■
Tp. 2													■	■	■		■
Vln. 1	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		X	X	X	■	■
Vln. 2					■								■	■	■	■	
Vla.					■								■	■	■	■	

Exposition 4b. The tone-colour constellations of the apotheosis motif of *Miške* in tabular form

Exposition 4a indicates the first entrance¹² and Exposition 4b lists the complete appearances of this motif in tabular form. In a similar fashion to the main motif:

- There are almost no tone-colour constellations (only bar 70 correlates with bar 248).
- There are constellations in all possible octavations.
- The density of the sound varies from one to eight instruments.
- There are several constellations with the violins playing the motif in octaves.

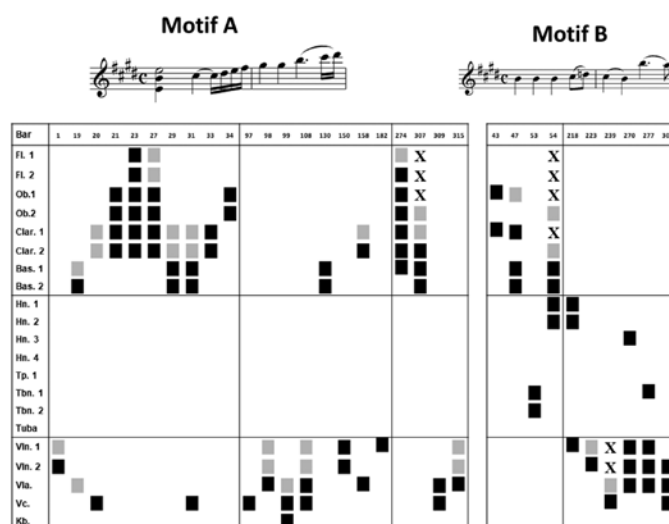
In summary, the abstraction of the sound dispositions of the three motifs in tabular form has shown that Čiurlionis must have had concrete thoughts with regard to the following compositional task: if one musical parameter is in a low level (many appearances of the same motif), another parameter (variety of tone-colours) should be in a significantly higher one. This establishes a general balance. The successful completion of this compositional feat is one of the most difficult artistic achievements in musical composition. Expositions 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b and 4b prove that Čiurlionis accomplished this task remarkably early in his life, even though his compositional studies were not yet completed.

Jean Sibelius' early symphonic works (Overture in E-Dur / 1891 and En Saga 1892/1902)

Sibelius' and Čiurlionis' biographies share some common features; their compositional oeuvre became essential for the cultural birth of their countries towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, both spent a part of their studies in German-speaking countries and some of their first orchestral works were symphonic poems, composed approximately at the same time.

Due to those similarities, it would be of great importance to apply the analytical methods of approaching *Miške*, to the early orchestral works of Sibelius, in order to find similarities and differences.

The aspects of instrumentation and tone-colour analysis in Sibelius' works have attracted little attention by music scholars.¹³ Especially his earlier compositions have barely been examined with respect to instrumentation. Sibelius' first orchestral composition has gathered relatively little attention from the Sibelius research world. Indeed, there are no music-analytical references on the instrumentation of his Overture in E-major. Sibelius himself talks about a duality between the two most important themes of his Overture in E-major.¹⁴ Does he separate the tone-colours in the instrumentation of these two themes in the way that Čiurlionis did with *Miške*?



Exposition 5. Sibelius' Overture in E-major: complete tone-colour constellations of the theme A and B

¹² In the manuscript, Čiurlionis notates no phrasing slurs over the notes of the flutes and violins. Legato-slurs were notated subsequently in the manuscript by another hand with a rose-colored pencil only over the violins. The modern score of 1975 inserts different articulations in both instruments and the articulation of the newest edition of 2000 deviates from both the manuscript and the edition of 1975. This is a further indication of the need to conduct a music-scientific investigation of the Urtext-edition of *Miške*.

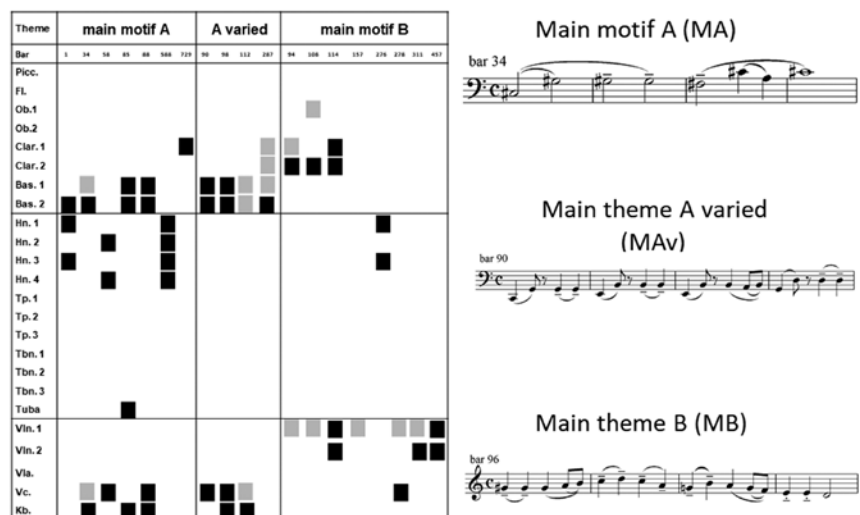
¹³ An exception are the papers by Rod Weidberg (2003: 216–226 and 2010: 239–267) and Efthimiou (2017: 299–316).

¹⁴ Murtomäki, Veijo (1997). Introduction to the orchestral score. Helsinki: Edition Fazer.

Exposition 5 lists all the appearances of the two themes and puts them in a tabular form. There are parts of the Overture where neither theme A, nor theme B appears. There are three blocks in this orchestral work (bars 1–35, 97–197 and 274–322), in which theme A occurs and two (bars 45–56 and 218–306) in which theme B occurs. In order to make these blocks clear, the table of theme A was separated into three parts and that of theme B into two. All the tone-colour properties of the previously analyzed works actually exist here as well: doubling in one and two octaves, a big variety in density and no tone-colour repetitions.

Both the earlier (1892) as well as the later (1902) versions of *En Saga* belong to the most interesting symphonic poems of the last decade of the 19th century and has been analyzed by several musicologists.¹⁵

All instrumentational features found in Čiurlionis' *Miške* and Sibelius' Overture in E-major, can also be observed throughout the various motifs of both versions of Sibelius' early symphonic poem *En Saga*.¹⁶



Exposition 6. Sibelius' *En Saga*, 1892 version: complete tone-colour constellations of the themes MA, MAv and MB¹⁷

After closer examination of Exposition 5 and 6, we see that Sibelius' instrumentation skills (similarly to Čiurlionis) were very accurate even in 1892. He was able not only to master the tone-colour characteristics of various instruments, but also to sketch and bring long tendencies in instrumentation. These are properties of a composer with a long experience in instrumentation.

Conclusion

The symphonic poem *Miške* is one of the most interesting symphonic poems composed at the turn of 19th century in terms of sound organisation. This symphonic work is characterized by the constant use of a limited amount of motifs. The current research praises the ability of the composer to create unity and diversity with regard to the motivic and harmonic aspects of composition.

This paper shows in detail that there is a further layer of organization, which deals with the instrumentation of the several motifs of *Miške*. The illustration of the complete tone-colour constellations of a reoccurring motif in tabular form and the description of those constellations through symbols enables us to reveal similarities between the early symphonic works of Čiurlionis and Sibelius in terms of instrumentation.

Moreover, it is of great importance to observe the development of these tone-colour characteristics in Čiurlionis' *Jūra* (composer's version), in order to find differences and similarities and to unveil certain long-term developments. Furthermore, the instrumentational characteristics of the music of Čiurlionis should be compared to the symphonic works of other composers towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

¹⁵ Not only from a formal, thematic and harmonic point of view but also in the field of semiotics (Murtoimäki 1995: 471–496).

¹⁶ See also: Efthimiou (2017: 305–312).

¹⁷ Considering the two versions of *En Saga* and the various motifs of this symphonic poem see also Wicklund (2008: 9–21).

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Kompozicinės M. K. Čiurlionio simfoninės poemos *Miške* instrumentuotės strategijos

Santrauka

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis užima ypatingą vietą XIX–XX a. Europos muzikos istorijoje. Jis yra ne tik nacionalinis Lietuvos kompozitorius, bet pripažįstamas ir kaip inovatyvus tapytojas. Jo simfoninė poema *Miške* yra viena įdomiausių simfoninių poemų, sukurtų XX a. pradžioje. Nors nemažai muzikologijos traktatų yra skirta tyrinėti formas, teminius ir motyvinius simfoninių poemų aspektus, jo orkestrinių kūrinių instrumentuotės subtilybės daugeliu atžvilgių lieka neatskleistos. Šio straipsnio tikslas – išnagrinėti simfoninės poemos *Miške* pagrindinių motyvų orkestrinę sandarą iš analitinės perspektyvos. Detaliai pristatomi šie pagrindiniai aspektai: melodinės linijos instrumentuotė, oktaviniai melodinės linijos dubliavimai, pasikartojančių motyvų instrumentuotė, taip pat žemųjų styginių ir varinių pučiamųjų sekcijos vaidmuo melodijos realizavimui.

Norint tinkamai suvokti pagrindinių motyvų instrumentuotės principus visos poemos kontekste, ypač svarbu įvertinti tembrinių spalvų konsteliacijas iš visa apimančios perspektyvos. Trumpai tariant, trijų motyvų (pagrindinio, mažojo ir apoteozės) garsinių dispozicijų reprezentacija tabulatūrine forma atskleidė, kad Čiurlionis greičiausiai turėjo konkrečių strategijų šiuo kompoziciniu klausimu: jei vienas muzikos parametras yra išreikštas mažiau (daugybė to paties motyvo pasikartojimų), kitas parametras (tembrinių spalvų įvairovė) turi būti išreikštas gerokai daugiau. Tai sukuria visumos balansą. Sėkminga šio kompozicinio iššūkio įveika – viena sunkiausių meninių užduočių. Straipsnio pavyzdžiai rodo, kad Čiurlionis su ja puikiai susitvarkė jau ankstyvame amžiuje, nors kompozicijos studijų dar nebuvo baigęs.

Čiurlionio simfoninė poema *Miške* yra lyginama su kitomis panašaus laikotarpio, tačiau skirtingų Europos geografinių lokacijų simfoninėmis poemomis. Atskleidžiami panašumai ir išryškunami skirtumai tarp Čiurlionio ir Sibeliaus instrumentuotės principų.