

## Reframing the Folk Song—the Compositional Approaches of Jonas Švedas (1927–1981)

**Abstract.** This paper discusses how Lithuanian composer Jonas Švedas (1927–1981) incorporated folk songs into his composition. Throughout his life, he created multiple works based on the same folk songs. This paper analyzes several works by Švedas (*Suite*, 1954–1955; *Musical Sketches* for piano, 1959; *Trys Posmai* for voice and piano, 1960; *Four Unsingular Pieces* for piano, 1968–1971) and aims to highlight how his relationship with folk music and creative approach to it evolved over time. The analysis revealed that, as time passed, the elements of folk songs in his works became increasingly abstracted, and one of Švedas’s masterpieces—*Four Unsingular Pieces*—embodies the process of cultural hybridization by merging components from various different cultures. In his compositions, Lithuanian folk songs are transformed through Western modernist techniques. In this way, Švedas occupies a unique place in the context of Lithuanian émigré culture.

**Keywords:** Jonas Švedas, folk song, piano, Béla Bartók, chromatic completion.

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### Introduction

In the realm of Lithuanian music history, it is noteworthy that two individuals named Jonas Švedas were simultaneously active at the same time. The achievements and life of Jonas Švedas (1908–1971), who remained in Soviet-occupied Lithuania, have been well-documented and thoroughly examined in the literature. Conversely, the legacy of another Jonas Švedas (1927–1981), who left Lithuania due to Soviet occupation and emigrated to the United States, has been unjustly neglected, rarely performed, and faded from public memory. To date, only two scholarly works have been devoted to the US-based Švedas in the musicological domain:

1. An outline of Švedas’s biography is presented in a monograph by musicologist Dana Palionytė, *Jonas Švedas—egzodo kompozitorius* (2012). Drawing on the recollections of contemporaries, the composer’s correspondence, and material gathered by the author, Palionytė reconstructs the essential episodes of Švedas’s life, identifies the main features of his creative output, and evaluates his work in the context of Lithuanian musical culture. However, given the limited access to US archives and the musical manuscripts preserved there, the book relies primarily on recollections and the composer’s epistolary legacy held in Lithuania.
2. In 2023 and 2024, I published two papers in which I divided Švedas’s creative output into two periods according to stylistic changes: the early period (up to 1960) and mature period (after 1960). Both papers aimed primarily to elucidate the overall biographical and creative trajectory of Švedas’s works—from his early to late stylistic developments and his engagement with modernist idioms—while also supplementing the gaps in Palionytė’s monograph by providing information derived from lost autographs and other previously unavailable sources.

Based on previous studies, in the present study, to examine the treatment and transformation of folk material as it manifests throughout Švedas’s entire compositional output, biographical details and general stylistic characteristics of the composer will be left to Palionytė’s monograph, while the discussion of the historical context will be kept to a minimum.

Švedas’s compositional output is by no means extensive and most of his works are limited to piano and chamber music. This can be attributed not only to the fact that the composer was an accomplished pianist but also to two additional factors: the first was pronounced as self-criticism. In his letters, he frequently voiced dissatisfaction with his works and contemplated rewriting them. This is confirmed by the existence of multiple versions of the same piece, which in some cases appeared decades apart (for example, the song “Skęstanti serenada” [Drowning serenade], 1952/1980, and the poem “Pokalbis su mirusiais vaikais” [Conversation with dead children], 1965/1976, have two versions).

The second factor was his compositional method, which was highly variable and inconsistent. On more than one occasion, he would abandoned works even at an advanced stage of development and never return to them. His correspondence and other sources also contain references to works that were contemplated but

never undertaken, such as Requiem.<sup>1</sup> In cases where the composition remained incomplete, he often reused or directly transferred the material into another piece. Švedas's Suite (1954–1955), *Two Musical Sketches* (1959) for piano, and *Trys Posmai* (Three stanzas) (1960) for voice and piano are good examples. The unfinished third movement of the Suite was extracted and reworked as “Musical Sketch” No. 1 (the fourth movement of the Suite was reworked as “Musical Sketch” No. 2). Furthermore, “Musical Sketch” No. 1 served as the basis for the third movement of *Trys Posmai*. These three works can be regarded as recompositions in terms of their musical content; in particular, Suite and *Musical Sketches* may be considered revisions of the same work. Similarly, Švedas's masterpiece from his mature period, *Four Unsingular Pieces* (1968–1971) was later reworked into the aria from his opera *J.S.B.* Unfortunately, despite extensive searches, the score was not found, and thus it could not be included in the present study. This study focuses mainly on Švedas's piano and vocal works based on folk material from each period (early: Suite, *Musical Sketches*, *Trys Posmai*; later: *Four Unsingular Pieces*) to elucidate the development of Švedas's compositional techniques, fusing folk song elements throughout his entire creation.

### Recomposition from Suite to “Musical Sketch” No. 1

Švedas's Suite for piano consists of four movements. The first movement has a laconic neoclassical texture, whereas the other three movements are attempts at adaptation or stylization. The second movement is modeled on the ostinato motif from Sergei Prokofiev's (1891–1953) Piano Piece Op. 4, No. 3. In this movement, the composer attempted to adapt and develop the musical idea of Prokofiev's piece. Based on the same motif, he also tried to develop the fourth movement, that is, a playful *perpetuum mobile* (although this movement remained incomplete). The third movement is an example of stylization, in which the melody of a Lithuanian folk song is overlaid with expressionist harmony. Either because of his dissatisfaction with the incoherence of Suite or because of a change in the composer's thinking, the third and fourth movements were later designated as a new musical opus: *Two Musical Sketches*. The recomposition from Suite to *Two Musical Sketches* is evident in their musical identity. The monothematic “Musical Sketch” No. 1, which was previously the third movement of Suite, is based on the Lithuanian folk song “Tu tu tu, kas būtu” (Tu tu tu, what would it be) (see example 1).

Example 1. Lithuanian folk song “Tu tu tu, kas būtu” (Slaviūnas 1959, 531)

Before analyzing Suite and “Musical Sketch” No. 1 in parallel, we examine the original folk song itself. “Tu tu tu, kas būtu” is a cheerful piece celebrating a bountiful harvest and has a simple strophic structure. Like many folk songs, it features a straightforward melodic design: consisting of only four notes, and the melody contains an ambiguity that allows it to be perceived as either major or minor. It is built from two repetitions of a simple motif and a cadence phrase, forming a strophe of four bars.

Švedas extracted only the second strophe, where the meter successively shortens from 6/8 to 5/8 to 4/8, and used this melody as the basis for the third movement of Suite as well as for “Musical Sketch” No. 1. In Švedas's manuscript, neither the title of this melody nor its source is indicated, and he never mentions the name of this folk song in his letters.

Judging from the distribution of repeated phrases across different registers and the similarity of harmonization, Švedas most likely drew on Kazys Viktoras Banaitis's (1896–1963) collection of choral arrangements, *100 liaudies dainų* (100 folk songs) (1951).<sup>2</sup>

In Banaitis's elegant choral arrangement (example 2), created for a choir, the main melody is effectively distributed among all voices except the bass, thus avoiding monotonous repetition. The first four measures of Švedas's Suite—with its chorale-like four-part texture and the way the main melody is distributed across various

<sup>1</sup> This work is mentioned in Švedas's letter to his friend, dramaturge Kostas Ostrauskas dated February 14, 1950 (Palionytė 2012, 93).

<sup>2</sup> Kazys Viktoras Banaitis. *100 liaudies dainų*. Prel. P. M. Juras, 1951.

registers upon each repetition—closely resemble Banaitis’s arrangement. Nevertheless, although Švedas’s Suite and “Musical Sketch” No. 1 go beyond mere arrangement, they cannot be considered as fully independent works that extensively develop their themes. Rather, they may be described as stylizations of distinctive folk melodies.

Example 2. Kazys Viktoras Banaitis. “Tu tu tu, kas būtu,” bb. 12–15 (Banaitis 1951, 69)

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Banaitis harmonized this folk song with A major, whereas Švedas separated the second phrase of the song and embedded it within an F# minor harmony. Unlike Banaitis’s harmonization intended for amateur choirs, Švedas gave his piece an expressionist color by employing his favored quartal harmony (tritone + perfect fourth; see example 3). Furthermore, Švedas’s accompaniment chords are consistently placed on the upbeat (*Auftakt*), omitting the downbeat, thereby making the subtly changing meters (6/4–5/4–4/4) even more ambiguous.

Example 3. Jonas Švedas. “Musical Sketch” No. 1, bb. 1–5 (transcribed by Yusuke Ishii from Švedas 1982, 8)

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Although the third movement of Suite and “Musical Sketch” No. 1 can be regarded as a revised version of the same piece in terms of musical content, a closer comparative analysis reveals Švedas’s meticulous compositional manipulation. In the opening of both pieces, the highest note, D, of the phrase serves as the melodic accent. Interestingly, as the changing meter indicates, the melodic motif “Tu tu tu” becomes slightly shorter in its second appearance (b. 3), implying that the intonation of this motif is not entirely identical each time throughout the phrase.

To convey this subtle nuance of intonation, Švedas marks a tenuto sign on C# instead of D in the first appearance of the motif, and then places the tenuto on D in the second appearance, aligning this D with the first beat of the bar. In “Musical Sketch” No. 1, he further alters the meter (while the Suite uses 6/4–5/4, “Musical Sketch” No. 1 employs 7/4–5/4; see example 4), adding another layer of rhythmic refinement to the music. Thus, within what seems to be a monotonous repetition of the melody, Švedas seeks to draw out to the fullest extent those ineffable nuances that cannot be notated, doing so within the framework of Western music language. This becomes clearer when the melody is varied.

Example 4. Jonas Švedas. The third movement of Suite, bb. 1–3 (above, transcribed by Yusuke Ishii from Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art (henceforth LLMA), col. 757, inv. 1, fol. 3, p. 6); “Musical Sketch” No. 1, bb. 1–3 (below)

Example 4. Jonas Švedas. The third movement of Suite, bb. 1–3 (above, transcribed by Yusuke Ishii from Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art (henceforth LLMA), col. 757, inv. 1, fol. 3, p. 6); “Musical Sketch” No. 1, bb. 1–3 (below)

From b. 5, the main melody moves to the tenor voice, an element that recalls Banaitis’s choral arrangement. In this tenor rendition of the main melody, a grace note is added to the first beat of measure 6—precisely to the note that Švedas marked tenuto in his score. This grace note collides with the E# from the chromatic line in the right-hand part, creating additional musical tension.

From b. 10, the main melody is transposed at an interval of perfect 4th. Here, Švedas raises the second note—originally G—to G $\sharp$ , resulting in a sound almost like that of the Lydian mode in D major (see example 5). This creates a striking contrast with the dark color of the opening in F $\sharp$  minor. Compared with the harmonization at the beginning, where the same chord is held during bars 1–3 and the downbeat is left unarticulated, from b. 10, each bar begins with a quartal chord—one of Švedas’s preferred sonorities—thereby reinforcing the expressionistic color in combination with the melody’s chromatic inflections.



Example 5. Jonas Švedas. “Musical Sketch” No. 1, bb. 10–11

After the fortissimo climax in b. 15, when the main melody is presented for the fourth time in the bass, harmony shifts from b. 17 to B minor. This can be understood as conventional plagal motion, where the subdominant (IV) is introduced before the final cadence. In other words, Švedas consciously worked within the framework of harmonic functionality, enriching it with quartal harmony. Thus, subtle manipulations are made to avoid monotonous repetition, not only in meters but also in harmony. Indeed, it is precisely in the harmonic domain that a decisive evolution can be observed between the two works.

The tonal functionality is mostly confirmed by the bass F $\sharp$ –C $\sharp$  (or C $\sharp$ –F $\sharp$ ) movements in bb. 7–8 of “Musical Sketch” No. 1, which clearly marks a tonic-dominant relationship. (In the third movement of Suite, the basses are based entirely on F $\sharp$ .) One of the fundamental changes in harmony from Suite to “Musical Sketch” No. 1 is bb. 8–9, where note A in the melody is maintained as an axial tone throughout the bar. This place remained F $\sharp$  minor throughout the third movement of Suite, while in “Musical Sketch” No. 1, when the bass shifts down a semitone, the F major triad can be heard enharmonically (see example 6). Švedas likely discovered the possibility of bitonality while maintaining axial tone in the works of Béla Bartók (1881–1945), with whom Švedas had the opportunity to become acquainted while studying at the American Conservatory in Chicago.<sup>3</sup>



Example 6. Jonas Švedas. The third movement of Suite, bb. 8–9 (above); “Musical Sketch” No. 1, bb. 8–9 (below)

These harmonic shifts also alter the elements beyond the theme’s melody. In b. 7, a countermelody with a longer note value (semibreve or minim note) appears on the right side. The countermelody of Suite in bb. 7–8 is D $\sharp$ –E $\sharp$ –G $\sharp$ , and that of “Musical Sketch” No. 1 uses a gentler chromatic scale (D $\sharp$ –E–E $\sharp$ –F $\sharp$ ) without G and G $\sharp$  (see example 7). This chromatic scale not only broadens the texture and range, leading to the forte in b. 10, but also incorporates the omitted G and G $\sharp$  from the main melody in bb. 10–11. As mentioned previously, these two notes are the result of Švedas’s manipulation of intervals to highlight the subtle nuances of the folk-song melody. By deliberately removing these two notes, bb. 8–9, G–G $\sharp$  of the main melody

<sup>3</sup> In 1958, Švedas orchestrated Bartók’s *Allegro barbaro* (1911) for piano (LLMA, col. 757, inv. 1, fol. 13). In this piece, the same melody is harmonized in two different tonalities—F $\sharp$  minor and F major.

in bb. 10–11 sounds particularly refreshing. Similarly, G is omitted in the chromatic scale of b. 14 to avoid repeating the emphasized G from b. 9.



Example 7. Jonas Švedas. The counter melody of the third movement of Suite, bb. 7–9 (above);  
“Musical Sketch” No. 1, bb. 7–9 (below)

Musicologist Paul Paccione refers to this type of twelve-tone organization as a chromatic completion (Paccione 1988, 85–93). According to musicologists, such phenomena occur in both tonal and early (free) atonal music; in the latter, chromatic completion becomes the ultimate musical goal, equivalent to a cadential function in tonal music. However, Švedas applied this technique to highlight structural relief. He used it in the same way in the third movement of his Sonata for Violin and Piano (1961). Švedas also employed this technique in his later works, including *Trys Posmai* for voice and piano.

It seems that Švedas did not consciously use this technique but rather acquired it intuitively while employing an expressionistic idiom based on free atonality, similar to the early works of Arnold Schönberg. In this way, he skillfully connects the subtle pitch manipulations of folk melodies with chromatic completion, although this does not appear to be directly related to Bartók’s influence on him. This can be considered an affinity with Bartók in terms of his creative philosophy; at the same time, it is also a common issue for other 20th-century composers who tried to draw on the potential in folk material. The pitch manipulation of the folk song is more relevant in *Trys Posmai*, in which Švedas further developed the technique of chromatic completion, reaching a nearly original twelve-tone technique.

#### Recontextualized folk material—*Trys Posmai* (Three Stanzas)

From a dramaturgical perspective, the chromatic completion technique is used effectively in “Mergaitės” [The Girls], the third movement of Švedas’s masterpiece *Trys Posmai* [Three Stanzas] (1960) based on Lithuanian poet, Kazys Bradūnas’s (1917–2009) poem *Maras* (Plague, 1947). Here, Švedas’s skillful compositional manipulation is revealed not only through the introduction of the piano (bb. 1–3), based on this technique, but also through the subsequent entrance of the voice, which is notable for its diatonicism. The use of diatonicism is not incidental in this movement. Within the spatially dispersed, pointillistic texture of the piano, one can easily discern a complete correspondence between melody and musical progression in “Musical Sketch” No. 1. Although the music is transposed a whole tone lower and somewhat expanded, Švedas incorporated the musical material from “Musical Sketch” No. 1 into “Mergaitės.” The song “Tu tu tu, kas būtu” is here transformed into a dark, almost decadent poem revealing “siuntančios mirties šešėliai” [the shadows of raging death] (see table 1). Švedas achieved an almost ironic recontextualization of folk melodies by incorporating a naïve folk song within a pointillistic texture constructed using the chromatic completion technique.

Opening bb. 1–3, which are absent from the plan of “Musical Sketch” No. 1, utilize the chromatic completion technique. In these bars, nearly all 12 tones are dispersed throughout the piano’s pointillistic texture, evoking the twelve-tone technique<sup>4</sup> (C–B–G–B<sub>b</sub>–G<sub>b</sub>–E–F–A–A<sub>b</sub>; see example 8). Here, the composer intentionally leaves out the tones E<sub>b</sub> and C<sub>♯</sub>, which appear elsewhere in the vocal lines. C<sub>♯</sub> first appears in b. 7, at the end of the folk song phrase. Originally, this closing tone would have been G, but Švedas substituted it with C<sub>♯</sub>. This insertion into the diatonic melody, along with the preceding B, creates a descending minor seventh, adding heterogeneity. This alteration of the melodic contour reflects the poem’s underlying meaning, while simultaneously removing the folk-like quality inherent in the melody (see example 9). The other omitted tone, E<sub>b</sub>, is introduced only at the climax of the work (b. 21–24). The climactic moment (b. 24) is highlighted by a strikingly resonant E<sub>b</sub>, which was originally an A in the folk melody. Through this use of chromatic completion, Švedas dramatizes Bradūnas’s expression of death.

<sup>4</sup> Since the exact same pitch pattern that appears at the opening reoccurs in b. 30, the passage could be interpreted as a partial use of the twelve-tone technique. However, as the composition cannot be said to be derived from the initial series, it is more appropriate to interpret it here simply as an instance of chromatic completion.

Table 1. Texts from the Lithuanian folk song “Tu tu tu, kas būtų” (left); “Mergaitės” from Kazys Bradūnas’ poem *Maras* (right)

Language	Lithuanian folk song “Tu tu tu, kas būtų”	“Mergaitės,” based on Kazys Bradūnas poem <i>Maras</i> (1947)
Lithuanian	Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad tėvas dirvonus išartų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad rugius miežius pasėtų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad mieželius iškultų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad salyklą sumerkų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad alutį padirbtų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad svetelius sukviestų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad alutį išgertų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, — Dainelių pridainuotų. Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad mieželiai išdygtų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad mieželiai užaugtų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad mieželius nupjautų? Tu tu tu, kas būtų, Kad mieželius suvežtų?	Pro medinę vartų koplytėlę, Ten, kur širdį Motinai sugėlę Septyni skausmingi kalavijai, Ji nutolsta begaliniame kelyje... O aplink šešėliai siuntančios mirties Ieško žemėje gyvybės paslapties...
English	Tu tu tu, what if the father were to plow the land? Tu tu tu, what if he were to sow barley? Tu tu tu, what if he were to winnow the barley? Tu tu tu, what if he were to drown the malt? Tu tu tu, what if he were to make some beer? Tu tu tu, what if he were to invite the guests? Tu tu tu, what if he were to drink the beer? Tu tu tu, whatever, —we would sing songs. Tu tu tu, what if the barley were to sprout? Tu tu tu, what if the barley were to grow? Tu tu tu, what if he were to harvest the barley? Tu tu tu, what if he were to bring the barley?	Within the chapel’s wooden gates, Where mother’s heart was hurt— Seven swords of pain. Into the endless distance she fades, While shadows of raging death Seek life’s secret upon this earth.



Example 8. Jonas Švedas. “Mergaitės”, bb. 1–4 (transcribed by Yusuke Ishii from LLMA, col. 757, inv. 1, fol. 9, p. 4)

Example 9. Lithuanian folk song “Tu tu tu, kas būtų” (above); Jonas Švedas. “Mergaitės”, bb. 3–7 (below)

At this point, it can no longer be regarded merely as stylization but rather as a fully independent composition. There are numerous examples of this technique recontextualizing musical material from the past into entirely unrelated settings. For instance, one may recall the incorporation of the sequence *Dies irae* in the second movement of Ottorino Respighi’s (1879–1936) *Impressioni brasiliane* (Brazilian impressions) (1928, Versekėnaitė 2004, 32), or the use of the Korean folk song *Mân-tai yep* as the basis for “La parole toute-puissante” (The all-powerful word), the twelfth movement of Olivier Messiaen’s *Vingt regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus* (Twenty contemplations on the Infant Jesus) (1944, Balmer, Lacôte, Murray 2017, 388–392). Nevertheless, no precedent can be found in the history of Lithuanian music for such a folklore recontextualization. This approach differs greatly from the conventional adaptation of folklore that Lithuanian composers have employed for many decades. Švedas treats folk elements as musical material in a different way, akin to Bartók’s approach.

### Compositional approaches to transforming folk material

In the 2023 paper, I discussed the influence of Bartók on Švedas's early works as well as the aesthetic similarities between them. In the earlier Hungarian period of Bartók's career, the protagonists of his major compositions all seem to possess a "face"—that is, a distinct personality or narrative that represents Bartók's identity as an East European (for example, *A Kékszakállú herceg vára* (Duke Bluebeard's castle), Sz. 48), 1908–1911; *A fából faragott királyfi* (The wooden prince), Sz. 60, 1914–1917; *Der wunderbare Mandarin* (The miraculous mandarin) Sz. 73, 1918–1919). However, from the 1930s, this tendency underwent a radical transformation. Works such as *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, Sz. 106 (1937), the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, Sz. 110 (1936–1937), and Concerto for Orchestra, Sz. 116 (1943) bear impersonal and austere titles—works, so to speak, "without a face." In this evolution of titles and genres, one may discern Bartók's gradual turn from programmatic and character-centered expressions to an abstract and autonomous musical language.

Based on the ways in which Bartók treated folklore in his compositions, four compositional approaches can be distinguished, reflecting an increasing degree of transformation of folk elements: these approaches of abstracting folk music elements can be applied to a greater or lesser extent not only to Bartók's works but also to the works of composers who, particularly those from outside Western Europe, within the modernism of the 20th century, sought to incorporate and transform their own cultural backgrounds into their music.

1. Harmonization or adaptation of folk material without altering its original structure or harmonies (for example, Bartók's *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs*, Sz. 71, 1920, etc.).
2. Stylization or harmonization using heterogenous or borrowed harmonies in contrast to the original melody (for example, Vytautas Bacevičius's (1905–1970) Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 12, 1929; Joseph Cantloubé's (1879–1957) *Chants D'Auvergne*, 1923–1930).
3. Fragmentation of folklore into elements of musical language—such as rhythmic patterns or melodic lines, which are incorporated episodically into a work, or only certain elements or their parts are employed (for example, Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, 1926–1937; Akira Ifukube's (1914–2006) *Japanese Suite* for piano, 1933; Jeronimas Kačinskas' (1907–2005) String Quartet No. 3, 1993, and others).
4. The abstraction of fragmented musical-language elements into metaphysical components, such as numbers, proportions, and similar concepts, and their subsequent reconstruction within a composition (for example, Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, 1936–1937, and others).

Švedas's Suite and "Musical Sketch" No. 1 fall under the first approach. Meanwhile, the melody of the third movement of *Trys Posmai* by Švedas, which organically merges into a pointillistic texture, is completely decontextualized while retaining the original melodic intonation and syntactic structure. Although this compositional resolution does not entirely correspond to the third approach, it is closely aligned. What makes Švedas unique is his fusion of the deformation of diatonic folk melodies with chromatic completion techniques.

Švedas further developed the treatment of folk music in his later works, which increasingly abstracted its musical elements of folk music. The next chapter discusses the relationship between folklore and Švedas's works during the mature period, by applying the aforementioned compositional approaches.

### Švedas's mature period—an "imaginary" folk song

During the 1960s, Švedas, who was highly self-critical in refining his own compositions, as well as in his early period, remarkably decreased his creative output. Only three works were composed in the 1960s—*Sonata brève* (1965) for piano, the first version of the poem "Pokalbis su mirusiais vaikais" [Conversation with dead children] (1965) for three vocalists and two pianos, and *Four Unsingular Pieces* (1968–1971) for piano. This chapter examines the folk song melodies that recur in the latter two works and their treatment. The folk song used in Švedas's mature period is fictional rather than pre-existing, akin to being imaginary.

This melody appears for the first time in the poem "Pokalbis su mirusiais vaikais," the second time in *Four Unsingular Pieces*, and the third time in the aria of his opera *J.S.B.* (1975), because the latter is a recomposition of *Four Unsingular Pieces*. This melody accompanies Švedas's creative activity during this period as a kind of *idée fixe*—an omnipresently recurring motif. The composer made several remarks concerning this melody, which is based on a harmonic major scale, in his letters, and on the covers of his manuscripts. For example, in a letter dated September 20, 1967, this melody, alongside a twelve-tone series, was described as "Lithuanian" (figure 1).

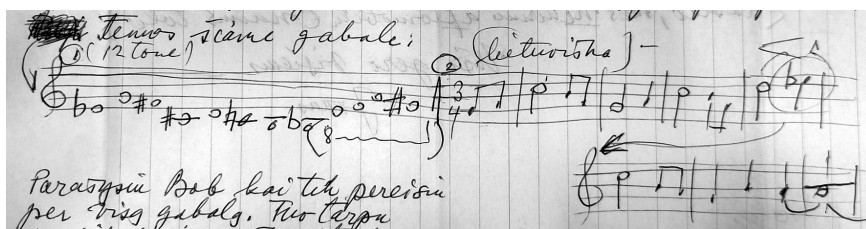
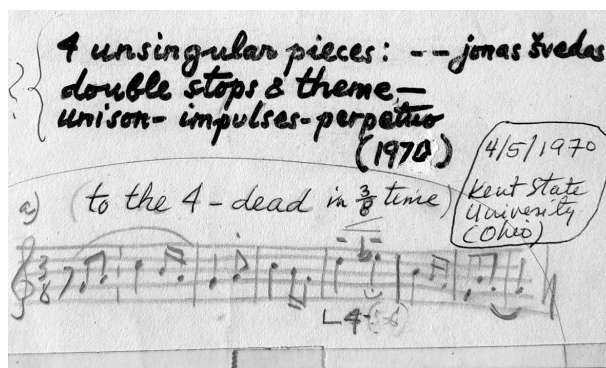


Figure 1. Švedas's letter to Kostas Ostrauskas dated September 20, 1967 (MLLM GEK 93956)

Indeed, it bears resemblance to Lithuanian folk songs such as “Sūpuoklinė daina” (Swing song) (see example 10). However, the author of this article has not found an identical melody in the collections of Lithuanian folk songs; thus, it is more likely to be Švedas's original collection. Švedas also noted the same melody on the cover of the manuscript of *Four Unsingular Pieces* (figure 2).



Example 10. Lithuanian folk song “Sūpuoklinė daina” (Četkauskaitė 1981, 214)

Figure 2. The cover page of the manuscript of Švedas's *Four Unsingular Pieces* (LLMA, col. 757, inv. 1, fol. 5)

The composer mentioned the melody once more in a note dated April 17, 1979, where he referred to it as a “Lopšinė ponui Šmicui” (Lullaby for Mr Schmitz) (see figure 3). Based on the designation of my previous study in 2024, this melody is hereafter referred to as “the lullaby theme.” As the term “lullaby” suggests, the melody is characterized by an ascending and descending contour reminiscent of the gentle rocking of a cradle, similar to that found in the aforementioned pre-existing Lithuanian folk song, “Sūpuoklinė daina.”

Figure 3. Švedas's notes on the lullaby theme (LLMA, col. 757, inv. 1, fol. 14)

Švedas's annotation of the lullaby theme reveals his particular attention to the climax of this melody, the note E<sub>b</sub>. The composer even circled it in red and added an explanation: "I would ask that this melody be sung to him [Ostrauskas' cat—Y. I.] with great sensitivity.<sup>5</sup> The E<sub>b</sub> is that point of culmination between life and sleep." The term "sleep" here can be understood not only in the literal sense of slumber but also metaphorically, carrying the connotations of death. Indeed, E<sub>b</sub>, which accentuates the expressiveness of the melody, plays an important role in all works in which this melody appears. In Švedas's "Pokalbis su mirusiais vaikais," he combines this lullaby theme with chromatic completion and the twelve-tone technique in part. However, in terms of folk song treatment, this does not go beyond the techniques used in *Trys Posmai*. Since I have analyzed this in detail in my earlier publication (Ishii 2024), here I will focus on Švedas's unique treatment of folklore in his *Four Unsingular Pieces* for piano, for which I was unable to conduct a detailed analysis in my previous paper.

#### Transformation and abstraction of folk elements in *Four Unsingular Pieces*

Švedas composed *Four Unsingular Pieces* between 1968 and 1971. During this period, an event profoundly affected the composer. In May 1970, at Kent State University, a violent confrontation broke out between students protesting the Vietnam War and mobilized soldiers, resulting in the deaths of four students—two men and two women (see figure 4). Upon learning of this tragic incident, Švedas composed a four-movement work<sup>6</sup>—apparently dedicating each movement to one of the four victims—entitled "Introduction and Theme," "Unison," "Saraband" and "Perpetuo." Therefore, it is unsurprising that in a work dedicated to the memory of the dead, Švedas incorporated the previously mentioned lullaby theme, which implies communion between the living and the dead. It is worth recalling that the song "Tu tu tu, kas būty," discussed in the first part of this paper, also came to symbolize death through its recontextualization.

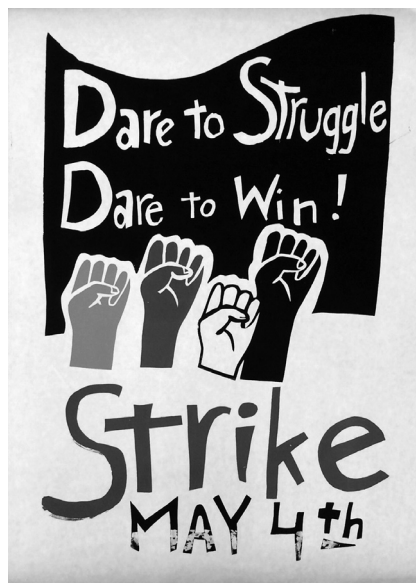


Figure 4. The poster *Dare to Struggle / Dare to Win! / Strike / May 4th*, which called for a nationwide student anti-war strike in 1970 (Cat. No: 219166)

Švedas wrote the lullaby theme on the cover of his manuscript of *Four Unsingular Pieces*, where he deliberately emphasized the D–E<sub>b</sub> of b. 5 as the "culmination between life and death" by deforming the rhythm to a quadruplet, even going so far as to indicate a tenuto (see figure 2). One can reveal an interesting coincidence of the trichord consisting of these two notes and the C following with the opening motif of "Tu tu tu, kas būty" mentioned earlier in the paper (see example 11). Furthermore, both melodies symbolize death in Švedas's work. This trichord, D–E<sub>b</sub>–C, is symbolically folded into *Four Unsingular Pieces* in varied forms.

<sup>5</sup> This refers to the female cat of Kostas Ostrauskas. Švedas called her "Šmicas" (a masculine name in Lithuanian) and therefore they often "disagreed" with one another. Wanting to win the favors of his cat, the composer wrote her a lullaby (Palionytė 2012, 185).

<sup>6</sup> This work represents one of the few politically engaged works by a Lithuanian émigré composer, in which the focus is directed toward international rather than Lithuanian events.



Example 11. Lithuanian folk song “Tu tu tu, kas būtu” (above) and Švedas’s lullaby theme (below)

The commemorative nature of this piece harks back to the musical genre *tombeau* (tom) tradition, exemplified by works such as Denis Gaultier’s (1603–1672) *Pavane ou tombeau pour M. Racquette* (Pavane or tom for Mr. Racquette) (ca 1670), Louis Couperin’s (1626–1661) *Tombeau de M. Blancrocher* (The tom for Mr. Blacrocher) (around 1660), and Johann Jakob Froberger’s (1616–1667) *Tombeau fait à Paris sur la mort de M. Blancrocher* (The tom, composed in Paris on the death of M. Blancrocher) (1652), among others. Conversely, the four-movement arrangement of Švedas’s composition—structured according to the Baroque principle of alternating slow and fast tempos—reflects the Baroque keyboard suite model. Froberger pioneered the four-part sequence model (*allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande*, and *gigue*). By adopting a similar formal structure, Švedas simultaneously alludes to the conventions of the *tombeau* genre. Nevertheless, he was not the first to blend elements of the *tombeau* genre with the Baroque suite. In the early 20th century, Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) explored a similar fusion in *Tombeau de Couperin* (The tom of Couperin) (1914–1917). Although *Four Unsingular Pieces* is modeled on the four-movement Baroque suite, Švedas organized the suite structure in an unconventional manner. In this work, he abandoned the traditional metric notation, marking measures with dotted lines. Double barlines are used between the first three movements, and *attacca* indications appear at the end of the first and second movements. Consequently, the first three movements were performed without interruption. The fourth movement, performed independently, establishes a relevant thematic relationship with the first movement, as I will mention later.

This peculiar structure of the work is suggested by its English title, which includes the word “unsingular” (“un”—negative prefix; “singular”—meaning 1) “extraordinary, exceptional, special”; 2) “indivisible, integral, inseparable”). This term may be considered as a neologism coined by Švedas. Literally translated, it means “divisible” or “non-unified.” This interpretation contradicts the continuous *attacca* flow of the first three movements and the thematic coherence between the outer movements. However, the composer alluded to a certain discontinuity in the work by performing only the third and fourth movements rather than the entire set in sequence. This ambiguous expression is closely related to the unconventional structure of the suite in which one can discern the degree of self-irony on the part of the composer.

Although the first three movements are performed *attacca*, there is no evident consistency in their musical language or textures. This heterogeneity among movements is not unrelated to the lullaby theme being distinctly audible only in the first movement, with subsequent movements lacking any apparent thematic linkages.

We begin our analysis with the first movement. The seven chords in b. 1 seem to have no apparent relationship with the lullaby theme. This can be understood as the result of Švedas’s distinctive approach in which he symbolically represents the four victims in an almost numerological way. Here, the same chords of the two notes are played simultaneously in both hands, with the upper notes notated as half notes and the lower as quarter notes (see example 12). Although it is impossible to determine which note represents men and which represents women, the simultaneous sounding of two identical dual chords symbolically refers to four people who were shot (two men and two women). Moreover, these seven chords played in b. 1 may further allude to the twenty-eight mobilized soldiers involved in the assault (seven chords of four notes). The introductory section (bb. 2–9) is derived from the intervals of these chords.



Example 12. Jonas Švedas. First movement of *Four Unsingular Pieces*, b. 1 (transcribed by Yusuke Ishii from Švedas 1982, 28)

However, this numerological symbol is limited to b. 1. From a thematic perspective, the lullaby theme in the first movement is treated simply. The entire theme is presented twice: the first time fortissimo in thickened sixths, and the second time pianississimo. From b. 24, the musical process develops with a) the initial trichord of the lullaby theme being replicated by b) a trichord containing the “culmination between life and sleep” (see example 13). Here, the composer effectively uses the piano’s acoustic possibilities and specificity. For example, when the lullaby theme first appears in b. 10, it is harmonized by acoustically rich sonorities in the bass and sustained by the pedal, encompassing the spectra of higher overtones. Owing to this acoustic property of the piano, the same theme produces a very different impression when it reappears. Highlighted by an augmented octave from b. 14, the theme seems to sound from a distance or in the unreal world.



Example 13. Trichords a) and b) in Švedas's lullaby theme

Such an acoustic effect was particularly favored by postwar avant-garde composers, such as Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) and George Crumb (1929–2022), who continued with the mysticism aesthetic. It is unknown when Švedas first became acquainted with Crumb's music. However, his admiration for this is evidenced by a letter he wrote between 1975 and 1979.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, although the strong affection for Bartók's works that characterized Švedas's early creative period seems to have faded, as Crumb clearly does not conceal his admiration for Bartók, it is still possible to discern the indirect implications of Bartók's musical idea in Švedas's mature works.

Crumb frequently incorporated the word “night” into the titles of his works, which alludes to Bartók's “Az éjszaka zenéje” (Night music), the fourth piece from his piano cycle *Szabadban* (Outdoors) (1926). This work is not only a masterpiece of 20th-century piano literature, but its originality also influenced many postwar composers, including Crumb. In Bartók's “Night Music,” one can perceive the sounds of nature and the outdoors, with occasional snippets of naïve songs surfacing—not as they would in reality, but as echoes within the composer's mind or memory. These two heterogeneous elements develop side by side, blurring the line between reality and imagination. Consequently, the piece contrasts the elements of the present (real-time sounds) with those of the past (sounds from memory). Similar compositional techniques are evident in the works of Crumb, for example, *Ancient Voices of Children* for mezzo-soprano, boy soprano, and chamber ensemble (1970) or *Makrokosmos* for piano with extended techniques (1972–1979).<sup>8</sup> The first movement of Švedas's *Four Unsingular Pieces*, in which the lullaby theme symbolizing death is presented within the harmony structures that exploit the overtones specificity of the piano as described earlier, closely resembles Crumb's compositional style and aesthetics. Nevertheless, its conceptual origin can be traced back to Bartók's musical ideas.

The second movement is a toccata played on the same 16th note melodic line without synchronization of the two hands. In this movement, Švedas applied the entire melodic contours of the lullaby theme to the overall pitch contours of the movement. In bb. 1–2 of the lullaby theme, the melody ascends and descends. In bb. 3–5, it reaches its peak on note E<sub>♭</sub>, after which it descends again. This ascending–descending contour corresponds to the overall registral rise and fall of the toccata-like movement. Notably, b. 16, when both hands synchronize and play D, and b. 18, the culmination point of E<sub>♭</sub> emphasized with fermata may symbolize the climax of the lullaby theme (see table 2).

Contour		Ascending and descending	Ascending until E <sub>♭</sub>	Descending
Lullaby theme		bb. 1–2	bb. 3–5	bb. 6–7
Second movement of <i>Four Unsingular pieces</i>	bb. 1–3 (Introductory bars)	bb. 4–10	bb. 11–20	bb. 21–32

Table 2. Correlation of melodic contour between Švedas's lullaby theme and the second movement of *Four Unsingular Pieces*

<sup>7</sup> Švedas sent a letter directly to Crumb, hoping to obtain the score of *Ancient Voices of Children* (Palionytė 2012, 28).

<sup>8</sup> Crumb's *Makrokosmos* clearly refers to Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*.

The composer's manuscript and the program of his concert held in Chicago on December 14, 1980, indicate that the third movement, "Saraband," was composed "pagal Händelį" (after Händel).<sup>9</sup> Although the rhythmic pattern of a Baroque dance is observed, it is "extremely difficult to hear or perceive traces of the great master on the keyboard" (Palionytė 2012, 40). The basic motivic cell of this movement is the trichord E–D#–F and its variants, which can be regarded as derived from the retrograde form of trichord b) (see example 13). Švedas scatters this motif throughout the movement as an ornament, reminiscent of the Baroque keyboard appoggiatura, subtly integrating it into the motion of the sarabande.

The fourth movement evokes the style of Baroque keyboard music even more strongly than the preceding three movements. It is a toccata based on the continuous motion of sixteenth notes performed in a narrow register with overlapping hands. The origin of this technique may lie in the Baroque harpsichord texture, where a two-manual keyboard was used. Another factor that evokes the Baroque style is the piano texture, which requires clear articulation techniques. While the pedal was used extensively in the first movement, it is kept to a minimum in the fourth movement, allowing the continuous flow of sixteenth notes to stand out clearly. This type of texture is also found in parts of the second and third movements.

It should be emphasized that in the fourth movement, the lullaby theme is reworked in various ways, including its vertical "compression" in the opening chord (b. 1, see example 13) and the insertion of its fragments into the first bars (example 14). The trichord of the theme (b. 45) and its inversion (b. 35) also appear fragmentarily. Such transformations of the motif, contributing to the coherence of the composition, reveal that Švedas's compositional approach reaches the third one mentioned in the previous section of this paper.

Example 14. Jonas Švedas. Fourth movement of *Four Unsingular Pieces*, bb. 1–14

We now outline the treatment of the lullaby theme melody across each movement of *Four Unsingular Pieces*.

- I: Exposition of the theme
- II: Application of the contour of the main theme to the entire movement
- III: Unification of the movement with a single motif, derived from the theme
- IV: Transformation, variation, and fragmentation of the theme

The treatment of the theme in the first and fourth movements, although fragmentary, still allows the melody to be perceptible. In this sense, it corresponds to the aforementioned third approach to folk-element transformation. In contrast, in the second and third movements, only certain parameters of the thematic melody are employed and transformed to develop musical content, making it almost impossible to identify the original melody. This folk-element abstraction follows the fourth approach.

<sup>9</sup> LTC Musicology archive, biography section: Aldona Stempužienė—d. 1.

Through detailed analysis, it is clear that Švedas drew creative inspiration from Lithuanian folk songs. What is particularly intriguing is that he used a Lithuanian folk melody (albeit one of his own invention) as the principal theme of the work dedicated to the victims of an American political event while simultaneously adopting the formal model of the Baroque suite. This chimera-like fusion of heterogeneous components becomes evident when compared with similar works such as Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*.

Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin* is a homage to his comrades who died during World War I and is also a tribute to 18th-century French Baroque music. Moreover, the *tombeau* genre belongs to the French musical tradition. Whether intentionally or not, this work reflects the composer's national identity. Švedas's *Four Unsingular Pieces*, which fuses components of differing cultural origins, can thus be seen as an instance of what cultural anthropologist George List calls hybridization (List 1964, 18–20)—a highly productive acculturation that gives rise to a new genre or style through the fusion of different cultures. Such a work can only be created in exile. This instance of hybridization can undoubtedly be considered a pinnacle of Švedas's mature period.

### Conclusion

Exploring Švedas's creative legacy reveals a composer who transcended national boundaries by engaging with universal modernist ideas. It has been observed that the degree of abstraction of folk elements gradually increases from Švedas's early to his mature works. From *Suite* and *Musical Sketches* to *Trys Posmai*, Švedas's treatment of folk material evolved from stylization to recontextualization. In this process, we observed that Švedas gradually discovered and refined the chromatic completion technique while transforming folk material. Thus, his compositional approach allowed him to infuse naïve folk elements with modernist idioms. One pinnacle example of his evolving technique is evident in *Four Unsingular Pieces*. Folk songs, whether authentic or imaginary, serve as catalysts for compositional inquiry rather than tokens of national identity. The strong influence of Bartók, evident in his earlier works, became less pronounced during his mature period, detectable only indirectly, for example, through his affinity with Crumb's works.

In his *Four Unsingular Pieces*, Švedas fused the Baroque suite model, the *tombeau* tradition, and the expressive language of modernism into a single, hybrid form. We can say that by abstracting and transforming folk elements into structural and symbolic components, he created a unique musical language that blended Lithuanian heritage with contemporary compositional techniques. In this context, Lithuanian folk songs, whether self-invented or not, symbolize both death and memory, intertwining personal loss with broader cultural narratives. *Four Unsingular Pieces* may, therefore, be regarded as the culmination of his search for a modern musical language capable of reconciling individual expression, national heritage, and cultural hybridization born of the exile experience.

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- LTC: Lituaniistikos tyrimo centras (Lithuanian Study Center)
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- MLLM: Maironio lietuvių literatūros muziejus (Maironis Museum of Lithuanian Literature)

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**Liaudies dainos perkūrimas.  
Jono Švedo (1927–1981) kompozicinis požiūris**

**Santrauka**

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama lietuvių išeivijos kompozitoriaus Jono Švedo (1927–1981) kūrybos raida, sutelkiant dėmesį į liaudies muzikos medžiagos transformavimą jo kameriniuose kūriniuose. Per visą gyvenimą jis sukūrė ne vieną kūrinių, pagrįstą ta pačia liaudies daina. Straipsnyje analizuojami keli Švedo kūriniai (Siuita fortepijonui (1954–1955), Du muzikiniai šķikai fortepijonui (1959), Trys posmai balsui ir fortepijonui (1960), Keturios pjesės fortepijonui (1968–1971)) ir siekiama išryškinti, kaip kito jo santykis su liaudies muzika ir kūrybinis požiūris į ją. Analizuojant šiuos aspektus paaiškėjo, kad laikui bėgant kompozitoriaus kūriniuose liaudies dainos elementai vis labiau abstrahuojami, o vienas Švedo šedevrų – Keturios pjesės fortepijonui – įkūnija kultūrinės hibridizacijos procesą, kai susilieja įvairūs skirtingų kultūrų komponentai. Jo kūryboje lietuvių liaudies dainos transformuojamos vakarietiškomis modernistinėmis priemonėmis. Taip Švedas užima išskirtinę vietą lietuvių išeivijos muzikos kontekste.