

# Čiurlionis in Japan: Reconsidered

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Over the last twelve years, my research has been carried out into the Lithuanian composer and painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911)’ relationship with Japan. Initially, the research began with a study of how Čiurlionis’ music and paintings were introduced in Japan, First, on Ichiro Kato, who introduced Čiurlionis to Japan through Japanese newspapers and his own articles. Second, how Čiurlionis’ piano music was first heard in Japan as the soundtrack to the film “Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania” by Lithuanian film director Jonas Mekas, and third, how the exhibition of Čiurlionis’s paintings was held at the Sezon Museum in Japan in 1992 after Lithuania restored their independence from the Soviet Union, and about the Čiurlionis CDs released on that occasion. The following sections introduce some of the musical works of Čiurlionis that were performed by Lithuanian musicians who visited Japan in the 1990s. Then, we will introduce a book “Čiurlionis: Time and Content” written by Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis, which was translated from English into Japanese, and Professor’s visit to Japan on the occasion of its publication. Finally, we will introduce the piano works (URTEXT edition) of Čiurlionis published by Yamaha Music Media Corporation. Therefore, in this article, the reception of Čiurlionis in Japan will be reconsidered in detail. (This article was re-edited and expanded from the presentation notes for the Čiurlionis conference held in Druskininkai in 2010 and 2011).

**Keywords:** Čiurlionis, Landsbergis, Ichiro Kato, Jonas Mekas.

## Introduction

It was only in 1970 that Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) was introduced officially to Japan for the first time. Before this, some Lithuanian-born artists such as Ben Shahn, Jacques Lipchitz, art historians Bernard G. Berenson and Jurgis Baltrušaitis Jr. were considerably famous in Japan. However, the Japanese did not link them to Lithuanian cultural tradition around this time.

Over the last twelve years, my research has been carried out into the Lithuanian composer and painter Čiurlionis’ relation-

ship with Japan. Initially, the research began with a study of how Čiurlionis’ music and paintings were introduced in Japan, and then moved on to a study of the influence of *Japonisme* on Čiurlionis’ paintings. Therefore, in this paper, the reception of Čiurlionis in Japan will be reconsidered in detail.

## 2. Ichiro Kato, who introduced Čiurlionis to Japan (1970)

Half a century after Čiurlionis’ death, the first Japanese person interested in Čiurlionis was musicologist Ichiro Kato (1930–2003).

In 1967, Kato encountered the name of Čiurlionis when he visited Artists' Club in Odessa; the name of the club was the "Čiurlionis". At that time, Yokohama and Odessa were sister-cities, and as a part of cultural exchange, Kato visited Odessa as a pianist as well as a Russian-Japanese interpreter. Eventually, just before Kato visited Odessa, Čiurlionis' sister Valerija Čiurlionytė-Karužienė (1886–1982) visited the club with Adelbertas Nedzelskis (1933), a Lithuanian painter who also devoted himself as a director of M. K. Čiurlionis Memorial Museum in Druskininkai for 33 years in 1964–1997. They brought some books, original music scores and LPs of Čiurlionis' works from Kaunas and gave them to a Ukrainian painter Oleg Sokolov. At the time, Kato was still in Moscow and was not able to see Karužienė and Nedzelskis. When Kato visited Odessa, Sokolov introduced Čiurlionis' art to Kato and gave him some music scores<sup>1</sup>. By a personal introduction through Sokolov, Kato became an acquaintance of Karužienė, and

<sup>1</sup> There is an interesting story that the piano music scores which had been given from Karužienė to Sokolov were given and some were delivered from Sokolov to Kato in 1967. They had been used for piano performances by Kato until 1987. As Kato was teaching the piano at his private piano music school "Muzika", there was a programme booklet of the 5<sup>th</sup> concert of commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> year of his music school on December 13<sup>th</sup> in 1987. According to that, 12 students played piano pieces of Bach, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Mozart, Joplin, Ivanovici, Mussorgsky, and etc. Kato played Čiurlionis' Preludes, Mazurka, Nocturne, a small song, an episode from the symphonic poem "The Sea" and Fugue in c minor at the end of the concert. This is the last printed event that Kato performed Čiurlionis' works. After Kato's death in 2003, the scores had stored for long time in the hands of his widow. However, they were now in my own collection.



Fig. 1

they started exchanging letters after Kato's return to Japan. Sokolov also sent him more materials of Čiurlionis' works. Kato read the books in Russian, listened to the recordings, and started learning Čiurlionis' piano works as he was a brilliant pianist.

Since 1968, he had started to play the Čiurlionis' piano works at house concerts for the members of the Japan-Soviet Friendship Association, and later the association also functioned as a "Čiurlionis Club" in Japan.

Kato wrote his first article on Čiurlionis in January 1970. He contributed the article "Revaluated Lithuanian Genius – M. Čiurlionis" to the Japanese newspaper *Soviet Journal* (Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1970) to introduce Čiurlionis for the first time in Japan. It was a great achievement to introduce Čiurlionis, even if only a few readers of the journal could know about the composer. (Fig. 1)

The huge contributions by Kato and the members of the Japan-Soviet Friendship Association allowed them to visit Kaunas



Fig. 2

in Lithuania. In the summer of 1974, they visited Kaunas to meet Valerija Čiurlionytė-Karužienė for the first time. (Fig. 2)

In 1975, Kato stayed in Stockholm<sup>2</sup> and attended the Third Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia from June 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>. On June 15<sup>th</sup>, Kato gave a presentation “M. K. Čiurlionis, the Lithuanian Composer and Painter, and the Correlation between Pictorial and Musical Compositions”. According to his diary, he did not visit Kaunas on this occasion; however, he continued his travel throughout Europe after the conference instead<sup>3</sup>. His diary and a printed concert programme booklet mentioned that Kato visited Odessa and attended the Concert of

Lithuanian and Japanese music which was held by Čiurlionis’ Club at the Green Hall of the House of Scientists (Str. Mendeleev. 4) on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1975. He gave a lecture in Russian which was similar in content to Stockholm, and also performed Čiurlionis’ “Preludes” and other works<sup>4</sup>. After his return to Japan, he wrote the same article in Japanese in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Čiurlionis’ birth for the Japanese Music Magazine *Musica Nova* in August 1975.

In 1976, by a recommendation of Dr. Edgar Anderson whom Kato met at the conference in Stockholm, Kato was given an opportunity to write an article

2 Kato stayed at the hotel in Hässelby castle from June 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> in Stockholm.

3 Romualdas Neimantas wrote in *Čiurlioniui 100* (Vaga, Vilnius, 1977) pp. 330–33 that “In 1975 summer Čiurlionis club members visited Lithuania.” However, according to Kato’s diary, it was in 1974 when Kato actually visited Kaunas with over 20 members of delegation of Yokohama city. In 1975, Kato travelled all over of Europe; however, he did not visit Lithuania.

4 A. A. Stanko (violin) and V. M. Vysotskaya (piano, from Odessa State Conservatory) also performed works of the Japanese composer, Yoshiro Irino, “Improvisation”, “Canon” and “Rondo”. Kato then performed his piano work “Japanese Fantasy”. Irina Sienkiewicz put lyrics to Kato’s work “Songs about Odessa” and her 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils sung the songs accompanied by Kato’s piano. Finally, the film “M. K. Čiurlionis” (Lithuanian Film Studio) was screened. Since then, Kato frequently visited Odessa in 1975, 1978, 1979, 1983 and 1984.

“M. K. Čiurlionis, the Lithuanian Composer and Painter, and the Correlation between Pictorial and Musical Compositions” for the *Journal of Baltic Studies* (Volume VII, Number 1, Spring 1976) in English which was the first academic paper on Čiurlionis written by a Japanese musicologist<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, he was invited to the Fifth Conference on Baltic Studies which was held at Columbia University in New York from May 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>. He gave a presentation “Čiurlionis and the Problem of the Synthesis of Arts --- from the Standpoint of the Japanese Aesthetics ---”<sup>6</sup>. After the conference, Kato also visited the Lithuanian community in Chicago and was interviewed by the Lithuanian Newspaper “Akiračiai” and an article about Kato “Kalbame su Ichiro Kato --- Apie Lietuviškas pasakas, Čiurlionį ir kitką (Talk with Ichiro Kato --- about Lithuanian tales, Čiurlionis and other things)” was in the newspaper on Nr. 8 (82) in September 1976.

In 1979, Kato was again invited to the Fifth Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia, and gave a presentation titled “Orientalism in Čiurlionis’ Creation” which was trying to show common features between Čiurlionis’ symbolism and Japanese traditional aesthetics<sup>7</sup>.

5 There is a letter from Arvids Ziedonis, Jr, who was an editor of *Journal of Baltic Studies*, which mentioned that Dr. Edger Anderson has suggested considering Kato’s manuscript for publication.

6 The typed manuscript of the presentation still exists in Japan. Also, there is a letter from Valdas J. Zept, the editor of *Journal of Baltic Studies*, that suggested Kato to submit his manuscript of the Conference in New York for another issue for *JBS*, however, it seems not to have been released.

7 The typed manuscript of the presentation also still exists in Japan.

In another example of Kato’s commitment to Čiurlionis, he wrote in 1982 an entry about “M. K. Čiurlionis” for the third volume of *Heibonsha Encyclopaedia of Music* in Japanese (Heibonsha, Tokyo, 1982), which was first time Čiurlionis was mentioned in the reference.

Since Kato had got cerebral infraction in early 1990’s, gradually he became unable to play the piano, as well as having difficulty with his physical condition. As a result of this, he was not able to attend the first exhibition of Čiurlionis’ paintings at the Sezon Museum in Tokyo, 1992.

### 3. Čiurlionis in Jonas Mekas’ “Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania” in Japan (1973)

Within the same period that Kato introduced Čiurlionis to the small circle through his writings and piano performances, Čiurlionis’ music was unexpectedly introduced to Japan via another route. In 1973, Lithuanian-born filmmaker Jonas Mekas’ documentary film “Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania” was premièred at Kinokuniya Hall in Tokyo, and after the great success of the film, Japanese people became familiar with the country of Lithuania. Before this, Lithuania was still an unknown mysterious county to the Japanese. The historical situation and everyday life in Lithuania became widely known because of the film. Also, several Čiurlionis’ piano works which were repeatedly played in its soundtrack gave audiences fresh and unforgettable impressions with the film. Although most of the Japanese audience did not know whose music it was, they were impressed by the tranquil melodies heard



Fig. 3

fragmentarily in the film. Indeed, they were VL 169, VL 184, VL 187, VL 188, VL 199, VL 239, VL 248 and VL 260; all played by Prof. Landsbergis the highly acclaimed pianist in a Melodiya LP record made in Soviet Union in 1962, serial number Do12339/ 40 (SU, 1962). These pieces emerged repeatedly for twenty times in parts I and II of the film. Surprisingly, all music was taken from the first 8 tracks out of 9 (from A-side of the disc). Since then, several other Mekas' films have been screened in Japan many times. Especially, "Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania" has been screened almost every year all in many parts of Japan. It has become one of the most cherished films among Japanese moviegoers and was also released on VHS. (Fig. 3)

#### 4. The first Čiurlionis' exhibition and CDs in Japan (1992)

It can be said that the 1990's was the groundbreaking period during which Čiurlionis was formally introduced to Japan. After the restoration of Lithuanian independence

from the Soviet Union was declared in 1990, the first exhibition of Čiurlionis' Paintings was held at the Sezon Museum in Tokyo in March-April, 1992<sup>8</sup>. It was also the first exhibition of Čiurlionis after the restoration of Lithuanian independence. Akira Moriguchi, a curator of the Sezon Museum in Tokyo visited Lithuania to get permission for the exhibition in the winter of 1991. The journey from Japan to Lithuania was still inconvenient at the time. Moriguchi and his assistants had to hire cars and drivers and drove over 10 hours from Moscow to Vilnius. Moriguchi arrived just before the

8 The Sezon Museum had introduced modern and contemporary arts the most actively at the time in Japan. The Russian avant-garde arts and paintings of the Georgian painter Niko Pirosmanni were exhibited at this museum for the first time in Japan.

The Čiurlionis' exhibition was held on March 7<sup>th</sup> to April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1992. Čiurlionis' 60 paintings, 90 of engravings and drawings, and letters and music scores were displayed with live music performance as well as recorded music of his works. The exhibition received 18,928 visitors but resulted in the loss of 29,375,000 yen. Quoted from: *The Seibu Museum of Art – Sezon Museum of Art: 1975–1999* (Sezon Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1999).





Fig. 4



Fig. 5

appointed time with Professor Landsbergis. Professor Landsbergis kindly agreed to the plan for the exhibition in Tokyo. (Fig. 4) Then Moriguchi subsequently visited the National Čiurlionis Museum in Kaunas to select the works for the exhibition<sup>9</sup>.

In 1992, Prof. Landsbergis visited Tokyo as the first head of state of Lithuania and attended to the opening ceremony of the exhibition. At the reception of the ceremony, Čiurlionis' String Quartet in c minor was performed by a Japanese student quartet from the Tokyo College of Music. Two volumes of the exhibition catalogues were published, which became as the first monograph of Čiurlionis written in the Japanese language. This exhibition was reviewed in about 10 art magazines and newspapers in Japan. (Fig. 5)

On the occasion of the exhibition, the Japanese record company King Records worked together with "Lituanus", (a Lithuanian branch of the record company "Melodi-

ya" of the Soviet time, which was renamed as Lituanus after the independence) undertook producing CDs of Čiurlionis' symphonic poems, piano pieces and folksongs. In particular, the symphonic poem "the Sea" was the world première recording of Čiurlionis' original manuscript. A CD of "Works for String Quartet" was also released from the Teichiku Records in Japan in 1993. (Fig. 6)

## 5. Lithuanian musicians who visited Japan (1994–2009)

The exhibition of an American avant-garde artist group "Fluxus" was held at the contemporary art gallery "Watari-um" in Tokyo in 1994–95. (Fig. 7) On January 24<sup>th</sup> in 1995, Prof. Landsbergis visited Tokyo and give a talk with Prof. Mitsuyoshi Numano of the University of Tokyo and the following day he held a piano recital. Prof. Landsbergis played Čiurlionis' preludes, variations and folksong arrangements. Most of the pieces were being performed for the first time in Japan. In fact, the Fluxus' leader George Maciunas and Prof. Landsbergis were classmates when they were

<sup>9</sup> Akira Moriguchi wrote the episodes from his Lithuania visit for the exhibition in his book *Tenrankai no E (Pictures at an Exhibition)* pp. 104–27. (Bijutsu Shuppan Sha, Tokyo, 2001).



Fig. 6

in primary school, and also Prof. Landsbergis was an overseas “satellite” member of Fluxus. Many Japanese artists and musicians participated with Fluxus such as Ay-O, Yoko Ono, Toshi Ichihyanagi, Takehisa Kosugi, Shigeo Kubota, Takako Saito and Mieko Shiomi.

In September in 1995, the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra and its conductor Juozas Domarkas visited Japan for the first time and gave concerts in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. They performed the Japanese premiere of Čiurlionis’ Symphonic poem “In the Forest”, Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No. 2 with Petras Geniušas, the world premiere of Martinaitis’ Unfinished Symphony<sup>10</sup>. (Fig. 8)

The orchestra and Juozas Domarkas again visited Japan in 1999 and performed for concerts in Tokyo, Osaka and Okinawa. They performed Čiurlionis’ “De Profundis” (première in Japan), Beethoven’s 9th Symphony in Tokyo, Čiurlionis’ Symphonic poem “In the Forest”, Dvořák’s Cello Concerto with Matheu Rogué and

<sup>10</sup> Wagner’s Lohengrin Prelude to Act III and Brahms’ Hungarian Dance No. 5 were performed as encores.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Shostakovich's 5th Symphony in Osaka and Okinawa. (Fig. 9)

At the beginning of the 21st century, Lithuanian musicians are still coming to Japan. Prof. Landsbergis and the Čiurlionis Quartet visited Japan on the occasion of the Aichi Expo which was held in the midland of Japan in 2005. (Fig. 10) At the Expo, reproductions of Čiurlionis' paintings were put on display, and his music was performed by the Čiurlionis Quartet. They also visited the contemporary art gallery "Watari-um" in Tokyo. On August 26<sup>th</sup>, Prof. Landsbergis gave us a piano performance of Čiurlionis, and a lecture entitled, "Politics was changed by the Arts". Čiurlionis Quartet performed Mozart's Adagio and Fugue K.546, Čiurlionis' String Quartet in c minor, and Piazzolla's Tango.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

In 2006, the Čiurlionis Quartet visited Tokyo again on the anniversary of the restoration of the State of Lithuania of 1918. On February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006, they performed Čiurlionis' String Quartet in c minor, Mozart's String quartet in G major, Kuprevičius' Six Lithuanian folksongs for string quartet (dedicated to Čiurlionis Quartet), Borodin's Nocturne and Piazzolla's Tango. (Fig. 11)

In August 2009, the Rūta and Zbignevas Ibelhauptas Piano Duo visited Tokyo, Miyazaki and Kuji in Japan. They performed a piano duo version of Čiurlionis' "In the Forest" (arr. J. Aleska), Schubert's Fantasie in f minor, Milhaud's Scaramouche, Rachmaninov's Suite No. 2, Infante's Andalusian Dances in Miyazaki and Kuji cities. In addition to these pieces, they also performed Japanese composer Atsuhiko Gondai's





Fig. 12

“69” and Sodeika’s Tone Ontology No. 2 in Tokyo. (Fig. 12)

#### 6. Čiurlionis’ music performed by Japanese (1997–2005)

In 1996 and 1997, Kazuhiko Komatsu conducted the Orchestra of Doctors in Aichi Prefecture and held charity concerts to raise funds for medicine and medical equipment for Lithuania. At the concert in 1997, Čiurlionis’ Symphonic poem “In the Forest” was performed by a Japanese orchestra for the first time. A Lithuanian pianist, Petras Geniušas, was sent by the Kaunas Medical Academy to join the concert and Brahms’ Piano Concerto No. 2 was performed together. Brahms’ Symphony No. 2 was also subsequently performed. (Fig. 13)

Tomona Miyazaki is one Japanese who was inspired by Čiurlionis’ music. She studied Čiurlionis for a Master’s degree at the Moscow Conservatory and graduated in 2003. In her debut concert tour in Japan 2004, she performed some works by Čiurlionis, and other Russian composers’ works from the Silver Age. Miyazaki visited Lithuania for several occasions to perform Čiurlionis’ music. In 2005, she privately released her second CD album, in which Čiurlionis’ pieces (VL 169, 162, 234, 164, 271, 270, 269 and 317) were included.

#### 7. Japanese translation of Čiurlionis: *Time and Content* (2008–2009)

Finally, one of the remarkable events in the history of “Čiurlionis in Japan” took place in 2008 and 2009. A Japanese translation of Čiurlionis’ monograph by Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis was published in December 2008. The original English edition of *Čiurlionis: Time and Content* was first published by the publisher Lituanus in Vilnius



Fig. 13

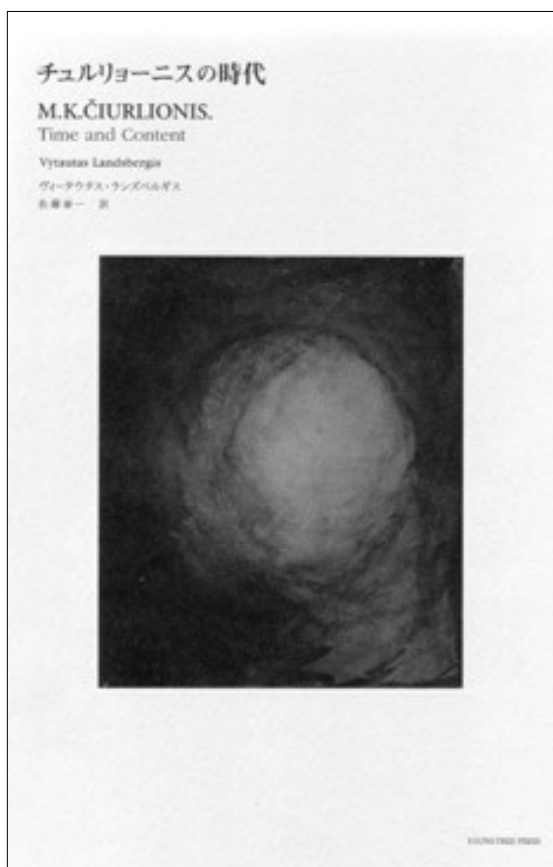


Fig. 14

in 1992. Dr. Taiichi Sato, who was an expert of the Russian piano music in Japan, was interested in Čiurlionis, and he and Shingo Wakagi of the publisher Young Tree Press received permission of Prof. Landsbergis to publish the Japanese translation. The professor himself added some commentaries for each chapter as well as two newly written chapters of “Photography of Čiurlionis” and “The Soul (the Spirit)”. Most parts of the book were translated from English to Japanese by Dr. Taiichi Sato, and two chapters newly written in Lithuanian by Prof. Landsbergis were translated from Lithuanian to Japanese by Prof. Ikuo Murata. The chapter “Photography of Čiurlionis” was written at the request of Shingo Wakagi, the president of the Japanese edition’s publisher, and the

Chapter “The Soul (the Spirit)” was written at the request of Prof. Landsbergis himself, who reworked a text that could not be published in Soviet times. Jonas Mekas also contributed a special introductory poem for the Japanese edition. As special features of the Japanese edition, a musical works list and a discography of Čiurlionis’ music were added to the appendices. It is a great benefit for Japanese people to be able to read the distinguished monograph of Čiurlionis in Japanese language with colour plates of paintings and the music of Čiurlionis. (Fig. 14)

Following the publishing of the monograph, Prof. Landsbergis made his fourth visit to Japan in November 2009. In a lecture-concert on November 20<sup>th</sup> in Tokyo, Professor performed Čiurlionis’ piano works such as the Prelude in d minor on the theme of a-d-f-b-es-ges (VL256), the Music for the Whit Sunday (VL 337a), the Variations on the theme “Sefaa Esec” (Nine-tone row, VL 258) and Lithuanian Folksong arrangements alongside paintings of Čiurlionis on the screen. He also gave a talk with Prof. Mitsuyoshi Numano of the University of Tokyo by explaining the details of the Čiurlionis’ arts. It was indeed a great experience to hear the professor’s deep understandings about Čiurlionis through the performance and lecture<sup>11</sup>. (Fig. 15, 16)

At the concert hall, Kuniko Kato, the widow of Ichiro Kato who introduced Čiurlionis in Japan was in attendance.

11 By the effort of the Cultural Attaché, Gabija Žukauskienė of the Lithuanian Embassy in Tokyo, the special booklet of the event was published. Čiurlionis’ arts were discussed from various perspectives by Japanese specialists, Prof. Ikuo Murata, Prof. Mitsuyoshi Numano, Yukihisa Miyayama, Shin-ichi Numabe and Yumiko Nunokawa.



Fig. 15

### 8. Čiurlionis: Piano Works (URTEXT) published by Yamaha Music Media (2011)

In December 2011, a collection of Čiurlionis' piano works (URTEXT) was published by Yamaha Music Media under the supervision and revision of Professor Darius Kučinskas. In addition to about 50 piano pieces, eight colour illustrations of paintings by Čiurlionis, and a portrait of the composer are included at the beginning of the score. (Fig. 17)

During half a century since Čiurlionis had introduced to Japan in 1970, there were significant cultural exchanges between Lithuania and Japan. As the result of many ardent people's efforts, Japanese nowadays know how gifted a composer and painter Čiurlionis was.

Finally, I would like to thank professors and people who gave me advice for this paper from Lithuania and Japan. Prof. Darius Kučinskas, Prof. Ikuo Murata, Mr. Adelbertas Nedzelskis, Mrs. Kuniko Kato, Ms. Gabija Žukauskienė, Mr. Yukihiya Miyayama, Mr. Shin-ichi Numabe.

(This paper was written based on the notes for presentations for the Čiurlionis Conferences held in Druskininkai, 2010 and 2011.)

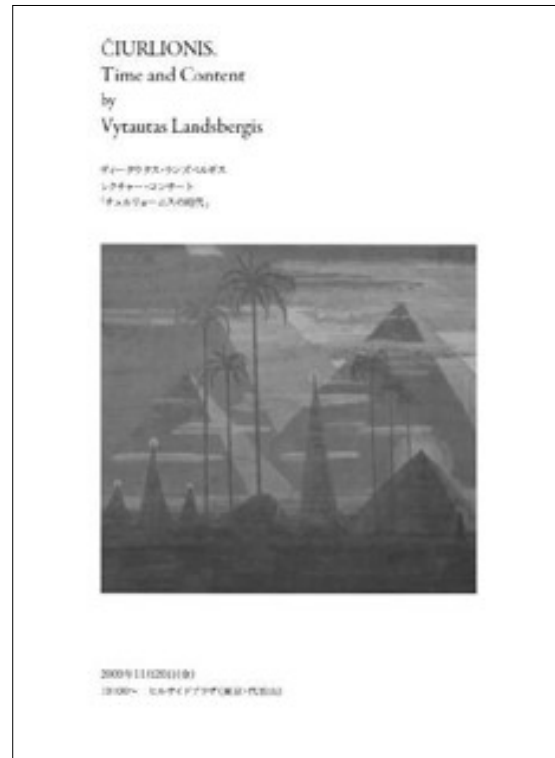


Fig. 16

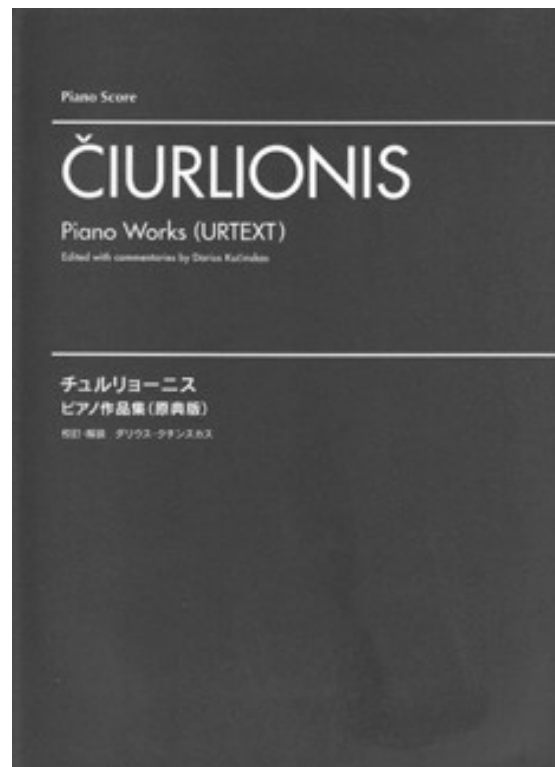


Fig. 17