

HE WHO CHOSE FREEDOM

Organist Jonas Žukas

Summary

The Lithuanian organ school is unique and not homogenous. It exhibits a correlation between the national traditions of our land and universal West European traditions that arrived in Lithuania in the late 19th century via German and Polish Catholic Church centres. In the inter-war years of the 20th century, our national organ school was enhanced by French and Italian organ traditions brought by Lithuanian organ players returning to their homeland after studies at West European higher schools of music. This interweaving of various traditions is reflected in the Lithuanian organ landscape in the eclectic relationship between the internal and external structure of the organ – often, the organ prospects (facades) are baroque, classical or neo-gothic in style, whereas their mechanical structure, pipework and the resulting sound is romantic.

Our organ school is not uniform in a historical sense either. Even though the appearance of the first organ in Lithuania is said to go back to the early 15th century, for a long time it could only be heard in magnates' courts or the churches they had founded, where the instrument was played by professional organists who had arrived from other countries, not Lithuanians. That is why we cannot consider the organ culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania a part of the Lithuanian professional identity. It was just during the organists' congress initiated by Juozas Naujalis at the end of the 19th century that an active movement developed, which prompted the emergence of the Lithuanian organ school.

In independent Lithuania during the inter-war period, the education of organists was orientated towards the European Catholic Church tradition based on church organ-playing. In the State Music School's organ class (founded in 1922, i.e., even before the school

gained the status of a higher school of music in 1933), the conception of an organist's professional competence was very broad. The active inter-war Lithuanian organ school's pupils concert performances, based on West European interpretation traditions, had gained rapid momentum by the end of the 1930s. Unfortunately, World War II, which began just at the time of the flourishing of Lithuanian national culture, halted the development of the organ school as well. The Soviet government, which replaced German occupation in 1944, pushed the organ out of the public cultural space as a religious cult instrument, while organ players were forced to choose other specialisations, close to their prior profession. The education of organists was only revived in Lithuania in the beginning of the 1960s. After a silence lasting almost two decades, a second strong wave flooded the concert organ space, initiated by the graduate of the Moscow Conservatory Leopoldas Digrys, who realised the renaissance of the organ in Lithuania in less than a decade.

The "golden age" of the organ began: concert organ-playing flourished, there were competitions, festivals (from 1968), organists went on tour, new works by Lithuanian composers were born, enriching the Lithuanian organ music pool. The organ as an art form simply became fashionable. Very good results were achieved in the teaching of concert organ-playing at the time, however the actively performing organists of the Soviet period had nothing in common with inter-war organ teaching. The church organist's specialisation and its broad spectrum of disciplines was only returned in the last decade of the 20th century. In 1990, along with the Sąjūdis Lithuanian independence movement and the Revival (Atgimimas), also reborn were the church organ-playing education traditions for performance that were present in inter-war Lithuania.

Looking back on this relatively long period, lasting over 100 years, of the education of organists in Lithuania – from the first steps towards professionalism to these days – it is evident that the formation of organ-playing traditions underwent significant high and low points. The art of organ-playing in Lithuania was influenced and formed by several distinctive figures who managed to initiate the professional de-

velopment of organists, from the beginnings of systematised teaching to seeking professional highs. However, regardless of their weighty contributions to the formation of the Lithuanian organ school, a number of organists were pushed into oblivion once the Lithuanian cultural and art space was dealt the strong blow of Soviet-era ideology.

In order to fill in the gaps in the history of our national organ school, and return to prominence names of importance to us, the object of this monograph became the organ player, teacher and performer Jonas Žukas (1907–2004), who grew up in the fertile ideological soil of independent Lithuania, who did not abide by the Soviet regime's rules and chose a course into the unknown in emigration in order to preserve a freedom of thought, speech and actions. Jonas Žukas was destined to unveil his brilliant nature. A firm character, determination, diligence, persistence, and of course talent, propelled him down his chosen professional path. In life, he was accompanied and formed by special figures, beginning with his parents – the organ player, choir conductor and teacher Kazimieras Žukas, and his aristocrat mother Elena Klimantavičiūtė, not to mention the people in his family's circle and study friends. He was helped along in his professional development by distinctive pedagogues – the ardent proponent of traditional Lithuanian music, composer and organ player Juozas Naujalis (1869–1934) as well as the famous French organ player and composer Marcel Dupré (1886–1971). Jonas Žukas collaborated with both of these artists from the start of his professional maturity until their final days. The strong mutual bond between these artists is evident from their rich correspondence legacy – utterly sincere letters, reflecting mutual respect and admiration. These letters are also documents of Lithuanian history, testifying to the close cultural links with other European countries. Many of the written sources given in this monograph show that while art had taken a distinct turn towards modernism in West European countries, inter-war Lithuanian organists were still driven by romantic ideas.

Jonas Žukas was one of the main teachers to have created the Lithuanian organ school in the inter-war period, enriching it with

French organ-playing traditions and introducing a liberal, modernist manner of performance into organists' repertoires and interpretation. After completing studies in organ with Naujalis at the Kaunas Conservatory (1926–1933) and with Marcel Dupré, one of the most distinctive creators of the French organ school, at the Paris Conservatory (1933–1937) and the École Normale de Musique (1936–1937), where he received diplomas with highest distinction (*Licence d'Enseignement et d'Execution*), Žukas returned to Lithuania and taught the organ, piano and improvisation for organists at the Kaunas Conservatory in 1937–1943. Through his professional contribution, he realised the hopes of his first teacher, Naujalis – to enrich the Lithuanian organ school with French interpretation traditions. Being one of the favourite pupils of Dupré, Žukas adopted his teacher's methodical principles which he applied when back in Lithuania, promoting the latest French organ repertoire and literature. Žukas' pedagogical principles were based on a liberal treatment of thought and the development of improvisation, as reflected in his own concert activities that spanned his entire productive creative life. Žukas' former pupils recall their teacher as free, creative, utterly responsible and precise, highlighting his erudition, professional competency, spiritual intelligence and ability to reveal the finest qualities of a pupil.

The research based on primary sources used the common descriptive and retrospective history *research methods*. The microhistorical sphere encompassed personal documents: correspondence, autobiographical entries, journal-like recollections where fragments of events in the lives of Žukas' family and friends intertwined. As if putting together the pieces of a mosaic, not only did the individual portrait of the figure being researched gradually emerge, but we also receive a glance into the social, cultural and political situation of the period in which he lived. The anthropological view easily offered up his character traits that grew more evident in different socio-cultural and geopolitical environments: in inter-war independent Lithuania, then in the same country yet under German and Soviet occupation, or in the grip of the destruction brought on by World War II, and in emigration – in Germany and the freedom-loving America. The mentioned

methodological approaches allowed conducting an organic case analysis, giving a concentrated reflection of Žukas' personality and surroundings.

This monograph has been derived from primary sources. The richest and most important part comes from Jonas Žukas' personal archive, provided to the author in digital and physical (paper) formats. This included letters, documents from various institutions, Jonas Žukas' own written recollections, handwritten and typewritten commentary, concert programs, booklets and the sheet music he used. Jonas Žukas' personal archive material is supplemented by the collections of the Lithuanian Archive of Literature and Art, the provisions, protocols, academic programs, diplomas and accreditation of the State Music School and Kaunas Conservatory, teachers' and students' files, various correspondence between the ministries of Education and Culture. A sizeable portion of archival material about Jonas Žukas is also kept at the Lithuanian Musicology Archive in Chicago. The broad geography of Žukas' concert activities is revealed in the monograph via the numerous concert reviews, comments and news releases published in Lithuania (*Naujoji Romuva*, *Lietuvos aidas*, *Muzikos barai*, *Muzikos menas*, etc.) and American Lithuanian community periodical journals from the day (*Draugas*, *Darbininkas*, *Lietuvių balsas*, *Tėviškės žiburiai*, *Muzikos žinios*, etc.). Žukas' methodical provisions and teaching principles are revealed based on his own published articles, concert recordings and conversations captured in radio programs.

Systemic studies about inter-war Lithuanian organists are still very rare; the activities of another eminent inter-war organist, Zigmantas Aleksandravičius, is similarly worthy of a separate book. Fragmented information about them can be found in Jūratė Landsbergytė's study, *Vargonų muzika Lietuvoje* (Organ Music in Lithuania, 2008) and her articles (1998, 2003). Biographical data about the Žukas family is concisely mentioned in the monograph by Alicija Rūgytė, *Švėkšna* (1974). Considerable attention to the organists Žukas and Aleksandravičius is given in the first monograph by this author, *Lietuvos vargonų menas. XIX a. pabaiga – XX a. pirmoji pusė* (Lithuanian organ art. The late 19th–first half of the 20th centuries, 2012), which reveals the artistic

and socio-cultural context of inter-war Lithuania. The current monograph expands on this knowledge with new, important details from the musicians' lives, reflected in their correspondence, archive documents and the press at the time.

In order to realise the set *aim* of this work – to thoroughly reveal the multi-faceted character of the talented musician Jonas Žukas – the *objectives* used in this monograph are reflected in the thematic chapter titles and the material they contain. The volume and variety of primary sources easily lent itself to forming the *structure of this book*. Eight thematic chapters follow a chronological order of the events in Žukas' life, highlighting essential biographical and professional dimensions – from his origins and the circumstances that unfolded in his life in Lithuania, to the emergence of this multidimensional character upon emigration to the United States.

The first chapter deals with the close and intermediate family surroundings forming his character in his childhood and in emigration. Biographical data about Jonas Žukas' family and roots are given here based on several sources – first of all, the handwritten and typed documents from his personal archive, which recall his own memories and commentary, and traces information about his family's history carefully collected over many years. Important information for this chapter came from the diploma work by Dalia Strimaitytė about Jonas' eldest brother Juozas Žukas and his family tragedy of deportation to Siberia, which had a painful impact on the whole extended Žukas family.

The second and third chapters evaluate the importance of Jonas Žukas' studies at the Kaunas and Paris conservatories on his further professional career. The impressions of his study years at the conservatories in Kaunas and Paris are conveyed in Žukas' own words, written much later when he was already in the United States. He wrote about the disciplines he was taught and “draws” the portraits of the pedagogues who taught him. Žukas gives a lively and rather detailed account of student-life in Paris, the daily routine that was not always very easy, and the friendly celebrations spent together with other Lithuanians who had also found themselves in Paris. His accounts

give interesting insights into the lives and creativity of Lithuanian cultural and art figures who went on to become famous.

Having presented the main directions in the Lithuanian organ school, the fourth chapter distinguishes the methodical provisions and pedagogical principles of the French organ school that Jonas Žukas represented, which he utilised in his own teaching activities. The dimensions of Žukas' pedagogical activities after his studies in Paris, once he had returned to teach at the Kaunas Conservatory, are defined in documents from the archive files of teachers and students. Žukas' methods are described based on his own published articles about the organ, Dupré's methodical text *Méthode d'Orgue* used during the study process, inscriptions made onto sheet music and students' recollections. The large number of his concert programs and press reviews is evidence of Žukas' concert activities.

There is very little data about Jonas Žukas during the difficult World War II period. Few wanted to speak about this tense time, mutual correspondence broke off, thus there are fewer written sources to refer to today. When the family of his brother and guardian Juozas Žukas were deported, Jonas was forced to look after himself to ensure he would not have to meet a similar fate. When the war began, work at all educational institutions that were still open (including the Kaunas Conservatory) continued, albeit in an irregular fashion and under great stress. Many teachers went into hiding to avoid deportation to Siberia (during the years of German occupation, all Jews living in Lithuania were victimised, being dismissed from their employment for no reason and struck off student lists). Jonas Žukas' family's decision to emigrate and their departure from Lithuania in 1944 is reflected in the realities of life of numerous musicians during World War II.

His recollections from the almost five years spent in emigration in Germany are presented in the fifth chapter, based on Žukas' own written accounts made at a later time, when he was already living in the United States. As much of the authentic language is left as possible, with no changes or corrections being made. The letters of his former teacher and now friend, Marcel Dupré, which reached him in emigration, helped to maintain the spiritual balance of the young, promising

organist forced to abandon his burgeoning professional career. The monograph quotes Žukas' memories, while Dupré's texts are full of belief, hope and spiritual strength.

The sixth chapter reveals the concert tour map of Jonas Žukas that reached from Lithuania to the United States, and highlights the individual, professional *credo* nurtured by this performer in the interpretation. Jonas Žukas' concert activities, which began in Lithuania, growing more intense once he moved to the United States, uncover his talent as a performer and his chosen path as an organist. The many concert programs appear to mark the dots in various locations, which once connected unite into a wide and far-reaching concert tour route from Lithuania to the many American cities he visited. Following his first concerts in 1937–1942 in Kaunas, many more recitals were to follow on the other side of the Atlantic – New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, Toronto, and elsewhere. New organ inaugurations could not go by without a performance by Jonas Žukas, special commemorations, exhibition openings or the establishment of new societies and associations within the American Lithuanian communities. Numerous concert reviews reveal the exceptional performance qualities and principles Žukas adhered to, and which helped him maintain a strong concert profile well into his older years. Žukas performed practically his whole life, marking his 80th birthday with concerts, followed up by several other recitals.

The seventh chapter reviews the letters of Jonas Žukas' pupils, colleagues and friends. The fragments of this systematised, rich epistolic legacy reveal a portrait of Jonas Žukas where his individual features are what shaped his path as a concert organ player. Along with many other documents published here for the first time are also the letters of Juozas Naujalis and Marcel Dupré to Jonas Žukas, cited in chapters 3 and 5. The surviving letters from Naujalis were written in 1933–1934 when Žukas was studying at the Paris Conservatory. Dupré's letters span the timeframe when Žukas was teaching at the Kaunas Conservatory, and during his emigration in Germany and the United States. The letters written by Jonas Žukas' pupils, colleagues and friends – themselves famous Lithuanian musicians, artists and art researchers –

which are cited in the seventh chapter reveal the features of their own and Žukas' characters, we learn about the circumstances he had to live through during the war years, in emigration, and once life had settled down somewhat, yet nonetheless enduring a kind of spiritual exile in the United States.

The end of the monograph describes the Jonas Žukas Young Organists Competitions that were held in Lithuania in 2006–2016, giving their results; this cultural event is discussed in the context of the cultural activities of young Lithuanian organists. It is this educational art event that spanned six competitions which heralded the virtual return of Žukas to Lithuania, his involvement in the education of organists here, and concert and other cultural life. Having reviewed the Jonas Žukas Young Organists Competitions, their significance on the vitality of today's organ school is assessed.

Jonas Žukas' bibliography gives a wide-ranging review of the press – from Žukas' concert reviews that appeared in the Lithuanian and American periodical press, articles and conference presentations, several radio broadcasts and various accounts of his life's events in the press, to Žukas' own publications that appeared in Lithuanian and American music magazines.

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By summarising the formation of organ-playing traditions in inter-war Lithuania, we can be sure that this pupil and follower of Naujalis and Dupré was a representative and creator of the *French* organ school in Lithuania. Based on the definitions of art schools by famous musicologists, it can be stated that the case of the creation of Žukas' pedagogical school illustrates the continuity of *personal pedagogical schools* phenomenon, where pupils create schools that maintain and develop their own teacher's traditions, extending and enriching them with their newly-acquired experience. Naujalis, having familiarised his pupils with theoretical literature about the French organ schools, encouraged them to take a further interest in French organ music and its interpretation. Jonas Žukas adopted Naujalis' experience and enhanced it with his own pedagogical and methodical experiences

from the Paris Conservatory, thereby realising his first teacher's hopes. From this perspective, the method developed by Žukas of the *first school* (Naujalis'), as a kind of system, performed the function of a *subsystem*. Guided by the pedagogical principles of Marcel Dupré that were based on teaching via improvisation and a liberal treatment of thought, Žukas extended the *local* Naujalis school with French organ-playing traditions.

Jonas Žukas' pedagogical principles are indeed based on a liberal treatment of thought and developed improvisation. The method he used when teaching organists at the Kaunas Conservatory is perceived from his comments made in concert programs and booklets, his reminiscences on his teaching work, also his precise notes made on sheet music showing fingering and pedal application, and the nuances of dynamic and articulation. Interpretation trends dominating Europe were reflected in the inter-war Lithuanian organ school. A neoromantic articulation tradition was alive, in keeping with the ideal *legato* principle and not emphasising the change in tempo, romanticising even early and baroque era organ masters' works. In terms of interpretation, an impressionist manner of performance prevailed – admiration for the colours inherent in the organ's sounds and the potential of register combinations, and their frequent change by layering sounds, as if painting in watercolour. Pedagogical aspects can also be found in Žukas' concert recordings, also in his own publications about famous world organists at the time, their work and concert activities, and the organ as an art form in general.

When the Soviets occupied Lithuania, many of Jonas Žukas' pupils changed their specialisations as organ-playing in public cultural life had no future, much like the instrument itself, considered an attribute of religious life during the Soviet period, organs only stood in churches, becoming an unwelcome and practically banned instrument. Nonetheless, a small group of Žukas' pupils did relate their lives in one way or another to organ-playing and the organ as an art form, working as organists in churches, organising concerts, and applying their acquired knowledge in organ-making – tuning, renovation, installation, writing about and popularising in other ways organ

culture in Lithuania and in Lithuanian communities in the United States. Žukas' pupils who spread around the world during the war years maintained contact with one another, writing letters and sharing their professional and life experiences. They formed a small community of like-minded musicians who shared the common spiritual, professional and human experience of their teacher. The two decades lost in the professional education of organists, on account of the war, also led to the loss of being able to adopt and continue the pedagogical direction taken by Žukas in teaching future organ players. However, written sources testify to the existence of an ideological Jonas Žukas school of thought that has united musicians scattered around the world, who applied underground means to maintain and develop the organ traditions implemented by their teacher.

Jonas Žukas concert activities were particularly impressive and intense, lasting for 50 years. Žukas performed in concerts from the completion of his studies (1937), to the ripe old age of 80 (1987), and a little more thereafter. Žukas took great care in preparing for his concerts, referring to several editions of a particular work, learning the musical material by heart and not rushing to the instrument. Having technically prepared the work on the piano and with a clear vision of the register, Žukas would then play at the organ by heart, without referring to sheet music or assistants. Audiences would always highlight his convincing interpretation, admiring his accuracy, clean performance and strong presence as a performer. Each concert Žukas gave would be an important event in American Lithuanian community life, receiving acclaim in the press and positive discussion during community gatherings for a long time afterwards. Another important nuance that reveals Žukas' attitude towards his artistic activities and utter dedication is that he would not accept fees for his concert appearances, leaving them for the community or donating them to a specific cultural event, such as the organisation of an exhibition, a memorial service, organ construction or the maintenance of this grand instrument.

Knowing the talent of Žukas and his obvious pedagogical skills that were revealed while teaching improvisation, organ and piano at the Kaunas Conservatory, it can be said that while living in emigration

in the United States, he never really had the chance to realise his calling as a teacher, yet he never renounced his profession under any life circumstances and was constantly performing in concerts. Žukas was not one to enter into compromises in his profession. During the difficult period of emigration and adaptation, when he had to search for a way of earning a living upon arriving in America, he did not choose the usual course of many emigrating musicians to become a church organist. He devoted himself to creative concert activities.

The inter-war organ school was not directly succeeded by the organ-teaching revival inspired by the coryphaeus of the Soviet renaissance in organ art, Leopoldas Digrys. The Western traditions that had flourished in Lithuania were for a long time silenced and ignored, avoiding any reference to the still living witnesses of the inter-war Lithuanian school: organist Jonas Žukas, who was then engaging in active concert performance in the United States, and Zigmąs Aleksandravičius, who lived in Lithuania and had dedicated himself to creative work and the teaching of theoretical principles. Nonetheless, the method practiced by these eminent figures and the inter-war organ-playing tradition, if not directly (not via a pedagogical chain but the periodically organised education event – the Jonas Žukas Young Organists' Competition), has still reached the young organists of our days. It is precisely the participants of this competition and its organisers that have entered in golden letters the name of Jonas Žukas into the history of the Lithuanian organ school, thus giving many the stimulus to play the organ.