

The significance of Lithuanian societies for the development of national musical culture and statehood

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Introduction

The 19th century in Lithuania began in 1795, with the last partition of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations and the final loss of statehood, and ended in 1915, when it became a theatre of operations during the First World War. It marked the end of the previous socio-political system, the *Ancient Régime*, and the development of new relationships based on the principles of personal freedom. This era was marked by uprisings and their suppression as well as the maturation of national self-awareness and the aspirations for statehood with brought closer the downfall of empires. At the beginning of the century, the hopes of Lithuanians, ignited by romantic dreams about the great past of their country, were suppressed by violence and coercion within it, yet in the end they brought to the final stretch of the nation modernisation. It could not have been otherwise, because the whole 19th century was described as the age of modernity; merely modernisation processes did not start in all countries at the same time. Due to Lithuania being pushed to the condition of the Russian periphery, due to its agrarian structure and backwardness in terms of material civilization, they were significantly delayed in the North-western Region (the so-called lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – GDL – annexed to the Russian Empire).

In the 19th century, nationality in Lithuania was often associated with a person's social status. The Polish meant a nobleman or a townsman, the Lithuanian a peasant, and the Russian a government representative. The at-

titude has been shaped by the concentration of the population in certain places according to their denomination, nationality, and origin as well as the nature of their cultural activities. Foreign nationals (Russians, Poles, Germans, Jews) were active in the cities; in smaller towns, the manors of nobles and dukes continued the traditions of the aristocracy of the GDL; and Lithuanian ethnic culture was thriving in the village. The long century stood out for a special passion for cognition, an aspiration for education, and a desire to acquire a profession. Due to that, the closed rural life began to change, and the interest of peasants in history, mother tongue, and literature grew stronger. It is no coincidence that increasingly more books and periodicals were published and new schools were established. Reading, making music, forming societies, and getting people involved in political and social life became widespread. The intelligentsia of peasant origin emerged – doctors, priests, teachers, organists. It was its representatives who became the initiators and leaders of the establishment of the first Lithuanian societies.

The first music societies in Lithuania

Music societies in Lithuania were first established as early as in the 17th century. Among the oldest ones was the society established in 1630 by Merkelis Eliaševičius Geišas, a Lithuanian bishop and state official of the GDL. No information survived about the activities of that society, but in accordance with the responsibilities of the founder and with the fact that the society was still called a confraternity, i. e. a religious brotherhood, it can be assumed to have taken care of the affairs of ecclesiastical music. In the 18th century, there were also societies of self-taught musicians, yet no information about them has survived. Those must have been a mutual-assistance type organisation. Representatives of other professions also formed similar societies. In 1818, there was the Society of Friends of Music in Vilnius, which held charity concerts and donated the proceeds to its poorest members. Stanisław Moniuszko, a Polish composer who had lived in Vilnius since 1840, founded St. Cecilia Society and was its leader. He sought to renew ecclesiastical vocal-instrumental ensembles, enrich their repertoire, and publish sheet music. After Moniuszko left Vilnius in 1858, the society ceased its activities a year later, and its ideas and plans were quickly forgotten.¹

1 Laima Budzinauskienė, "XIX amžiaus Vilniaus bažnytiniai muzikos kolektyvai" [Vilnius Ecclesiastical Music Groups of the 19th Century], *Istorija. Mokslo darbai*, no. 88 (2012): 33.

Music societies were mainly formed in cities where cultural life was really active. Before the late 19th century, their founders were exclusively foreign nationals living in Lithuanian cities, as there were few Lithuanian musicians; moreover, after 1864, they were not allowed to speak their mother tongue or establish their own organisations. Local Russians, together with those who arrived from other parts of the Empire, took advantage of the fact: on their initiative, in 1873, a branch of the Imperial Russian Music Society (IRMS) started operating in Vilnius. Its members were mainly tsarist officials and officers, who were not in favour of Lithuanian people. That organization focused on the dissemination of music by Russian composers. For this purpose, a small symphony orchestra was formed from music lovers and a couple of professionals, yet it could not boast a professional level. The musicians who would come to Vilnius to perform music on behalf of the IRMS would often bring artistically low-level concert programmes that they would not have dared to perform in St. Petersburg or Moscow.

Not to be short of performers and educated audiences, the IRMS established a music school in Vilnius, which operated in 1873 to 1884 and in 1898 to 1915. Practicing amateur musicians, and later graduates of Russian conservatories, were invited to teach. The school really flourished after 1898, when Mikhail Treskin, graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, became its head. Thanks to him, hitherto non-existent classes of composition, music history, drama, choral singing, and chamber ensemble as well as a library were opened, and the school was visited by composer Alexander Glazunov. Almost at the same time, a new Music Society was established in Vilnius, which operated from 1881 to 1885 under the leadership of pianist and conductor O. Lose. It united local musicians, and probably not of Russian nationality, as the Russians were concentrated in the IRMS division. This is only an assumption; however, it is supported by musical works in German performed by the members of the society: Haydn's oratorio *"The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross"* and L. van Beethoven's Fantasy in C minor for Piano, Chorus, and Symphony Orchestra op. 80. Of course, Russians also spoke German, yet it was more common among other foreign nationals in Vilnius, such as Poles, Jews, and Germans who had lived in Lithuania since olden times. Another music promotion centre in Vilnius was the Music and Drama Circle, which operated from 1885 to 1911. It held music and drama evenings as well as several dozens of concerts per

year, and thus attracted a lot of the city's intelligentsia.² The musical life of the city was also diversified by a group of musicians formed in 1893 under the Railwaymen's Club, which had existed for more than two decades. It was a kind of society seeking to meet the needs of people in one profession. In their club hall, the members of the group held concerts and charity music evenings. The local press complained: "*We have so many musical evenings in Vilnius that it is really impossible to describe them all.*"³

Kaunas refused to be inferior to Vilnius. In 1870, a circle of nine music lovers – a semi-amateur community – began to organise concerts of vocal-instrumental music. Its activities, which had ceased for several years, were resumed on 15 March 1882, after the circle had been taken over by the officially registered Kaunas Music Society.⁴ Its emergence in 1873, like the emergence of an analogous society in Vilnius in 1873, was directly related to the IRMS, which pursued two goals: to expand the network of music education throughout the country and to intensify concert life.

Until 1904, Kaunas Music Society was headed by Aleksandr Savinski, landowner, amateur violinist, and self-taught composer who worked as an employee in administrative institutions. He loved chamber music, sometimes assembled an orchestra, and sincerely fulfilled the undertaken commitments. One of them was establishing a music school, headed by B. Robman, on 6 February 1884. It had classes of singing, piano, violin, choral singing, music theory, and playing other instruments,⁵ and the teachers arrived from St. Petersburg and other Russian cities. Although education in the school was paid for, it was short of funds for its activities, and therefore Kaunas Music Society had to sponsor it. In 1900, the Society had about 600 registered members paying an annual fee, the amount of which depended on the member's category.⁶ The raised funds were used to purchase musical instruments, to accumulate musical literature for the school library, and to fund the choir and balalaika orchestra established under the society.

2 Dana Palionytė-Banevičienė, ed., *Lietuvos muzikos istorija. I knyga. Tautinio atgimimo metai* [A History of Lithuanian Music, Book 1. The Years of National Revival] (Vilnius: Lietuvos muzikos akademija, Kultūros, filosofijos ir meno institutas, 2002), 32.

3 3-й. "Отголоски," *Виленский вестник* [Vilnius Bulletin], no. 79 (1897): 2.

4 Diana Raudonytė, "Kauno muzikos draugija XIX a. antroje pusėje" [Kaunas Music Society in the Second Half of the 19th century], *Kauno istorijos metraštis*, no. 11 (2011): 77.

5 Ibid., 79.

6 Ibid., 77, 80.

Another important field of the Society's activity was participation in the concert life of the city. The participants included students and teachers from Robman's School, various choirs, military wind and Russian folk instruments orchestras, and also solo singers and instrumentalists. Concerts were mostly held in boys' and girls' gymnasiums, the People's House, and also in the rented City Theatre Hall. The proceeds went mostly to charities that cared for homeless babies, orphans, the disabled, and poor students. In the 19th century, that was a tradition in Russia that emerged in the authoritarian context of the regime: to take over part of the functions of an underdeveloped bureaucratic apparatus.⁷ About 1904, the Society of Fine Arts Lovers took the place of the disbanded Kaunas Music Society, which continued the work started by its predecessors not only in the field of music, but also of drama, literature, and art. Through its efforts, before the First World War, about 20 performances and music evenings per season used to be held.⁸ Russian societies had nothing to do with Lithuanian culture or the interests of Lithuanian people. Lithuanian audiences were not particularly interested in their activities, either. Lithuanian listeners. First of all, the city and rural life and people's needs were very different, and secondly, everything that was Russian seemed alien to Lithuanians. Therefore they, following the example of foreign nationals, began to form their own national societies; however, the conditions for their existence were very difficult.

Lithuanian societies in Lithuania Major

After the authorities of Tsarist Russia had disbanded Vilnius University in 1832 and had banned the press in Latin letters after the uprising of 1863, the establishment of Lithuanian societies became complicated. Nevertheless, Lithuanians resisted: they organised secret schools, published prayer books, newspapers, sheet notes, and books in their native language abroad and transported them to Lithuania across the border. Book smugglers were much in demand; the organisations of book smugglers and their sponsors emerged and accelerated the development of the national movement. Representatives of Lithuanian intelligentsia – doctors Vincas Kudirka and Jonas Basanavičius – became the initiators and publishers of the first illegal newspapers (*Aušra* [The Dawn] and *Varpas* [The Bell]), and the first illegal

7 Ibid., 76.

8 Laima Kiauleikytė, "Kauno muzikos draugija ir lietuvių muzikinės kultūros kontekstas" [Kaunas Music Society and the Context of Lithuanian Musical Culture], *Menotyra* 17, no. 3 (2010): 200.

societies formed in Kaunas Priest Seminary: The Society of Lithuania Lovers (1887–1905) and St. Casimir's Circle (1889–1905). Future priests and some of their teachers shared information about the printing and distribution of banned Lithuanian books and wrote articles for Lithuanian newspapers.

Music societies began forming much later. One of the first was established in Kaunas in 1899, when organist and composer of the Cathedral, graduate of Warsaw Institute of Music Juozas Naujalis formed the *Daina* [The Song] Choir from the representatives of the city's intelligentsia: he invited about 50 people of various professions, mostly music lovers, to it. The choristers of the illegal society would choose remote places for their rehearsals and concerts: in winter, it was secluded apartments, in summer, the skirts of the nearby Veršvai forest. They would even post guards to inform choristers of the danger of the approaching police. However, whenever the singers were caught unawares, they would not be intimidated and would either disguise themselves as a church choir or simply bribe government officials. Their first appearance before the public took place on 13 May 1901. Failing to obtain official permission, the choristers chose a forest site on the banks of the Nemunas River for the concert; they got there by steamboat and called the event a May picnic. The event was a great success: numerous participants sang and danced together. Since then, the tradition of May picnics spread throughout Lithuania.

After the ban on the press had been lifted on 7 May 1904, the *Daina* Society, which at the time had about 500 members, had the opportunity to legalise. After the approval of the Statutes, on 19 March 1905, it was officially registered and began to grow: a circle of drama artists was established, vocal and instrumental ensembles were formed, and professional singers were invited to participate in concerts. True, working conditions were not easy. Officials demanded that the lyrics of the songs and performances be translated into Russian, and that the texts contain not a single word intended to criticise or ridicule the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, the Society which brought together music lovers and professionals fostered national self-awareness through holding concerts of Lithuanian music, performances, lectures, dance evenings, and commemorations of people with special merits to Lithuanian culture. They would organise about 10 to 20 events per year and involved the Polish and Russian-speaking population of Kaunas in the cultural movement. The society successfully survived until the Second World War.

Legal societies were also founded in other Lithuanian cities: *Vilniaus Kanklės* (1905–1908) and *Rūta* [The Rue] (1909–1914) in Vilnius, *Varpas* [The Bell] in Šiauliai (1908–1914), *Aidas* [the Echo] (1906–1914) in Panevėžys, *Žiburys* [The Light] (1906–1914) in Marijampolė, *Undinė* [The Mermaid] (1908–1914) in Druskininkai, and *Kanklės* (1910–1914) in Telšiai. They had their own choirs, instrumental ensembles, drama circles, and some even orchestras led by graduates or students from the conservatories of Warsaw, St. Petersburg, and Moscow. They gave concerts, staged Lithuanian performances, and were touring provinces with prepared concert programmes. The goals of the societies were of a national scale: to encourage less educated people to get educated, to oppose the tsarist regime, and to foster the hope of restoring the independent state of Lithuania. At the same time, they provided the conditions for the new generation of Lithuanian composers and performers to perform and grow. Thus, Mikas Petrauskas, in collaboration with the *Vilniaus Kanklės*, staged his first opera *Birutė* in Vilnius in 1906; the composer's brother Kipras, who sang in the premiere, later became one of the most famous tenors of all time in Lithuania.

The first society of professional Lithuanian musicians was established in 1907 and operated until the First World War. It was an organization of church organists named after St. Gregory. Its founder, composer Juozas Naujalis, understood that the church was “*almost the only form of organised music making and concentrated listening that introduced the people of Lithuanian small towns and villages to professional music literature;*”⁹ moreover, he knew that organists lead both church and secular choirs as well as worked at schools as music teachers, and therefore he decided that they should be the first to get music education. To maintain the closest possible contacts with them, he had been publishing the first Lithuanian music periodical *Vargonininkas* [The Organist] as well as the *Vargonininko kalendorius* [Organists' Calendar] for several years in a row. In 1913, he legalised the organ courses he had been teaching since 1892.¹⁰ Thanks to Naujalis, the social situation of the organists was taken care of, and the social class differences between the priest as a “master” and the organist as a “servant” were sought to be eliminated. Although the goals had not been fully achieved, the organists found the courage to fight for their own rights, and their public and cultural activity as well as professional curiosity were awakened. As

9 Vytautas Landsbergis, “Vargonininkų gadyne” [The Times of Organists], *Pergalė*, no. 9 (1976): 155.

10 Ona Narbutienė, *Juozas Naujalis* (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1989), 36.

evidenced by the history of interwar Lithuanian music, even as late as in the 1930s, about 80 to 90 % of secular choir conductors acquired the profession of musicians upon starting to work as organists.¹¹

The organised activities of educated musicians differed from amateur societies in greater attention to the criteria of professionalism, the promotion of young composers, and scientific affairs. Thus, e.g., the Music Section of the Lithuanian Art Society in Vilnius (1908–1911), established on the initiative of M. K. Čiurlionis, announced the first competition of Lithuanian music works, which took place in 1910; the Song and Tune Collection Commission of the Lithuanian Scientific Society took care of Lithuanian musical folklore (1909–1914); meanwhile, Čiurlionis Company collected and promoted works by Lithuanian authors (1913–1915). Thanks to professional music societies, the ideas were born to establish music schools, a conservatory, and a theatre, and to accumulate and preserve the Lithuanian cultural heritage. Those ideas were implemented only after the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania.

Lithuanian societies in Lithuania Minor

Lithuania Minor was the north-eastern part of Prussia, the ethnic lands of Lithuanians, which was annexed by Germany in the second half of the 19th century. Its population could have rightly been proud of the better conditions for economic life and cultural activities. It was in this region that the first book, the first Lithuanian hymnal, the first collection of sermons in Lithuanian, a Lithuanian grammar, the first work of literature, and the first Lithuanian newspaper appeared. Quite a few print houses were established there, which published Lithuanian books and periodicals and provided them to their compatriots living in the Russian Empire and other countries with the help of book smugglers. The Romanticism that spread in Europe in the early 19th century encouraged Lithuanians in that region to study their language and history, to become interested in science, and to follow the political life in Lithuania Major. Germans also became interested in Lithuanian heritage, seeing the Lithuanian nation as a tribe on the verge of extinction. They communicated with Lithuanians, they founded the Lithuanian studies-related society *Litauische literarische Gesellschaft* (1879–1914), learned to speak Lithuanian, collected folk songs, and pointed out the differences between Lithuanian and German church hymns, how-

11 Antanas Budriūnas, "Vargonininkų parengimo klausimu" [On the Issue of Organist Training], *Muzikos barai*, no. 2 (1940): 45.

ever, it had never occurred to them that the nation could live independently, separately from Germany. Meanwhile, the main goal of Lithuanians in Lithuania Minor was to preserve their language and customs, as Germanization had been increasingly affecting their social life. To this end, in the second half of the 19th century, they began to form cultural societies.

In 1885 in Tilsit, which was considered to be the capital of Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor, the very first *Birutė* Society (1885–1914) was established, with divisions in smaller towns. Its members were encouraged to talk to each other in Lithuanian and to sing Lithuanian songs. Under the Society, a choir led by famous Lithuanian philosopher Vydūnas operated. He proclaimed that art was the most distinctive characteristic of man, a major factor in evolution, and it elevated humanity above nationality.¹² Those around him saw that humble man and philosopher as a priest, a prophet, and felt spiritually richer in his company. To commemorate its tenth anniversary, the *Birutė* Society organised a celebration on Rambynas Hill, on the other side of the Nemunas River. Since then, the tradition of celebrating major Lithuanian holidays in this wooded place, where Lithuanian songs sounded especially good, had taken root.

Due to disagreements among the members of the *Birutė* Society, Vydūnas together with a group of choristers established Tilsit Lithuanian Hymn Singers' Society (1895–1935), which became the most important axis of Lithuanian musical life. Its choir consisted of about 40–60, and occasionally as many as 80, singers. The singers often gave concerts, staged performances, and showed the prepared programs to the residents of the surrounding areas, both Lithuanians and Germans. It did not take the latter long to appreciate the artistic achievements of the Society. Peter Wilhelm Wolf, the director of Tilsit Music School, conductor, composer, graduate of Berlin Higher Music School who often attended concerts, praised the choir led by Vydūnas to German choirmasters as an example to follow and advised them to attend its concerts. The repertoire of the Hymn Singers' Society consisted of songs and hymns – original compositions by the choir leader and other Lithuanians as well as Lithuanian melodies harmonised by Germans. The hymn singers were among the first to start organising Lithuanian song festivals. They would include German orchestras that performed popular symphonic works of Western European classical music composers in their concert programmes. In that way, thanks to Lithuanian societies, the decline of the Lithuanian language in a German-speaking

12 Vydūnas, “Mano paskaitos” [My Lectures], *Gairės*, no. 1 (1924): 45.

land slowed down, while Lithuanians won the respect of foreigners through music.

Lithuanian Societies in St. Petersburg

At the time when any kind of Lithuanian public activities was banned in Lithuania, Lithuanian societies began to form in St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire. Quite a few Lithuanians lived there: some of them studied in higher schools, others found better-paying jobs, and all of them longed for their homeland. Therefore, the desire to communicate with each other, to support each other, to speak Lithuanian, and to sing and dance made them come together. In the late 19th century, the first and only legal Lithuanian organisation all over the Russian Empire, the Charitable Society of Lithuanians and Samogitians in St. Petersburg (1892–1918) was established. It united people of different social strata: students, workers, land-owners, and priests. Its main goal was to provide support to students and people in need and to develop their Lithuanian identity. The main form of activity were Lithuanian events; four of them could be held per one year. Their concert programmes included performances and music, afterwards followed by dances. The first charity concert took place in 1894. Because no Lithuanian performers had been found, only Russian music was performed, and Feodor Chaliapin, who had just settled in the Russian capital, also took part in it.¹³ Later, Lithuanians who studied at St. Petersburg Conservatory joined the Society. Some of them led choirs, others sang or played in the performances. On 13 (25) November 1899, Vincas Kudirka's "National Anthem" was first performed in a concert, conducted by Česlovas Sasnauskas; later it became the anthem of the State of Lithuania.¹⁴

The concert programmes of Lithuanian events had to be printed in Russian. That was not enough. The Censorship Committee had to be submitted the texts of the performances and the lyrics of the songs to be performed. Sometimes the posters were printed in two languages, and Gendarmes were explained that Lithuanian names were difficult to translate. Meanwhile, Russian officials were deceived by including some songs in the programmes, but actually performing some others, newly written ones,

13 Martynas Yčas, *Atsiminimai. Nepriklausomybės keliais* [Memories. On the Road to Independence], vol. 3 (Kaunas: Spindulys, 1991), 166.

14 Balys Sruoga, *Lietuvių teatras Peterburge 1892–1918* [Lithuanian Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1892 to 1918] (Kaunas: Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto leidinys, 1930), 21.

which had not been submitted to the censors, but which had been very much awaited by the Lithuanian audience.

Following the emergence of undemocratic moods within the charity society, those who separated from it founded the Lithuanian Mutual Aid Society (1899–1917), with a drama circle and a permanent troupe of actors established under it. It was a stimulus for Lithuanians to learn the correct mother tongue, to get acquainted with the basics of acting and directing, and to mature the idea of establishing their own professional theatre. It was merely dissatisfaction with a high membership fee that led to the establishment of a third organisation, the Lithuanian Society for Mutual Assistance for the Indigenous, or the Society of the Indigenous (1903–1918), which united workers and representatives of the left-wing intelligentsia. In this way, the Lithuanian community was as if divided into social groups: the benefactors were equated with the aristocrats, the Mutuals with the bourgeoisie, and the Indigenous with the proletariat. Artists and musicians accepted invitations from all societies and went on stage where they had greater opportunities to perform. All the societies held Lithuanian evenings, which mainly consisted of performances and choral music. Amateur choirs became a laboratory for young Lithuanian performers and composers, where they could carry out their creative experiments. Therefore, it was no coincidence that the newly created songs by Česlovas Sasnauskas, Stasys Šimkus, and Juozas Tallat-Kelpša were first performed in St. Petersburg, and operettas by Mikas Petrauskas were also staged there.

The choirs belonging to the societies sought to represent their community in the international arena. On 22 January (4 February) 1910, they participated in the concert of 14 nations, and on 27 December (9 January) 1912, at an ethnographic event. The aim was to emphasise the uniqueness of their country through cultural activities – the uniqueness of the language and folk songs, and the old traditions of the GDL. Gradually, the idea of raising the issue of Lithuania's autonomy at the political level began to develop. At the time, it seemed a particularly bold idea, as it was too early to think about complete secession from the Russian Empire.

Lithuanian Societies in the United States of America

The most favourable environment for societies to operate was in the United States, and the greatest number of them were active there. The first societies to form were the ones of mutual aid as well as joint associations with Poles. The first Lithuanian society was founded in New York in 1875, and the sec-

ond in Shenandoah in 1877. Their number increased rapidly as Lithuanians would come together on the basis of their professions, worldviews, or hobbies. All of them had their own statutes, mostly taken over from foreigners, but adapted to their own needs. The societies took care of the education of compatriots, of access to learning, book publishing and distribution, preservation of historical memory, support for Lithuania, and even its liberation from the tsarist oppression. In 1888, the Military Society was established in Pitstone, which sought to become the Lithuanian Guard and fight for the freedom of the native country. In the late 19th century, there were about 15 such guards in the USA.¹⁵ Each military society had its own uniform, swords, or even rifles. During holidays, their members would march in the streets and sing military songs. In 1889, the Lithuanian Scientific Society was established in Baltimore, which had a great influence on the development of science and culture in emigration. It gave impetus to the formation of the first Lithuanian theatre troupe. The Society of Homeland Lovers, established in 1896, focused on the education of compatriots and publication of Lithuanian books in the USA. Amateur choirs and orchestras formed under the societies. Ecclesiastical organizations lasted longer because they had better operating conditions – facilities for rehearsals and concerts as well as permanent choirmasters, while secular ones would often break up and then re-emerge again.

Music societies also kept emerging. One of the first of them was founded in New York in 1894 by choirmaster Leonas Ereminas who named it *Milda*, and then a secular men's choir was formed under it. A year later, the Society of Musicians and Singers of King David was established in Chicago; Dr. Vincas Kudirka Singers' Union operated in the same city, on the basis of which the *Birutė* Society with a very active choir came up; and in 1909, the *Pirmyn* [Forward] Society emerged. Before the First World War, similar organizations could be found in almost every Lithuanian colony. In 1911, the *Rūta* [The Rue] theatrical singer relief society started its activities; in 1912, *Garsas* [The Sound] the music and drama society formed, which later became known as *Kanklės*, followed by the Lithuanian Singers' Society in 1913 and the Society of Lithuanian Socialist Singers in America in 1914, while in Boston, *Gabija* was founded through the efforts of Mikas Petrauskas. These societies staged operettas and gave concerts, and not only of choral but also

15 Juozas Širvydas, *Biografijos bruožai* [The Traits of Biography] (Cleveland: Dirva, 1941), 112.

of vocal-instrumental music. Secular societies chose either national names or the names of the GDL, and religious ones were named after saints.

The first professional music society, the Lithuanian American Organists' Union, was founded in Baltimore in 1911. It united church organists for common goals: to nurture Lithuanianness through hymns and songs, to unify church singing, to train in the field of religious and secular music, to hold joint concerts, to encourage the creation of Lithuanian music, and to publish sheet music. Its heads took care of the professional and social affairs of their members as well as their qualifications and organised courses for them. Thus, church organists became the main disseminators of Lithuanianness, the organisers of musical life and song festivals. Due to them, a choir movement arose in the United States, which lasted until the First World War and involved thousands of people in it. The attention of cultural and music societies was focused not so much on the artistic level of choirs as on hymn and song singing in Lithuanian. Thus, the mother tongue became an essential criterion for the positive evaluation of a piece of music, even if it was an amateur one.

The establishment of choirs contributed significantly to the elimination of ethnographic differences, since the four-voice singing levelled out the specific features and dialects of the regions. In the lyrics of the songs, the words "homeland" and "Motherland" had been increasingly used, which helped to perceive Lithuania as a homogeneous country. Thus, the contours of national self-awareness began to emerge alongside regional identity. Religious and local affiliation did not disappear, however, a national union emerged, which became extremely important in the struggle for survival in a multinational America and in maintaining ties with Lithuania, which was trying to liberate itself from the Russian Empire. This is evidenced by the names of choirs and orchestras: Freedom of Lithuanians, Sons of Lithuania, Lovers of the Homeland, Lithuanian Soldiers. As the danger of assimilation was much higher in America than in Lithuania, Lithuanians chose a closed way of life in their diaspora, trying to distance themselves from the influences of other cultures and not to dissolve in the "*melting pot of nations*;" and they did succeed.

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