

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to say, that I am very happy to be here, in Sri Aurobindo Ashram; I came from Lithuania, the ancient European country, to Pondicherry to visit the sacred place of my heart and to introduce to You our composer and artist Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis. But for me it is not only a mere introduction. Presenting the music and art of Ciurlionis which expresses most elevated aspirations of our nation, here, in the holy atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Presence, I hope that in some occult way Lithuania will become more open to the transforming light and power of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Ciurlionis was born in 1875 in Lithuania. His father was a church organist. Ciurlionis showed considerable talent at a very early age. In 1894 with Prince Oginskis financial support, Ciurlionis set off for the conservatory in Warsaw, the capital of Poland, where he entered the six year piano program. Three years later while studying under the noted composer Zigmund Noskowski, he transferred to the composition program. Upon his graduation from Warsaw conservatory, Ciurlionis received an offer to be director of the new conservatory in Lublin, but he declined. He preferred his freedom. In order to continue his musical education, he entered the conservatory in Leipzig in 1901. In 1902 he returned home with his second conservatory diploma. A growing passion for painting was now taking hold of him. In Warsaw he began to attend private classes, and he completed his first serious painting ("Music of the Forest"), in the fall of 1903. For ideas and for help with interpretations he read widely: Nietzsche, Indian philosophy, and Rabindranath Tagore. He won significant recognition as an artist when his works were included in a show presented by the Warsaw school in St. Petersburg. In reviewing the show, Breshko-Breshkovky singled out Ciurlionis' contributions for special comment: "Even now at the dawn of his activity, he is completely original; he imitates no one; he is constructing his own path".

The events of 1905, the year of revolution in Russia, urged him on to a new course: "I have decided to dedicate all my past and future works to Lithuania", he wrote in January 1906. "In the cultural development of each nation," he says, "folk art plays an enormous role. It is the first expression of love - love for art, the primary discovery of spiritual interest, the primeval creative expression".

In the fall of 1907 Ciurlionis moved to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania; here he met his future wife, Sofija Kymantaitė, the important Lithuanian writer. In the fall of 1908 Ciurlionis went off to St. Petersburg. He felt he had to taste and try the artistic life in the Russian capital. Ciurlionis was immediately accepted by the Union of Russian Artists. At the same time he entered the St. Petersburg musical scene. Despite his avowed optimism, the "material side" of life was

weighing upon him heavily. He had so many artistic ideas in his head that he despaired of having time to realize them all, but they were not yet producing the hard cash he so desperately needed. The pressures and strains proved too much for him. A doctor diagnosed his condition as the result of "overwork" and advised that he be taken for a rest. He seems to have had little understanding of the acclaim his work was beginning to receive. Although all concerned continued to hope for his recovery and to seize on every positive sign, it was not to be. In the winter he caught cold while walking in the woods; this developed into ^{phju:lmouja} pneumonia. He died on April 10, 1911 just thirty-five years old and was buried in famous Rasos cemetery in Vilnius.

During his short but exceptionally prolific life Ciurlionis created over 300 pieces of music, about 300 paintings, and ^{isevise} several literary works. He sought to implement the idea of the ^{sinopsis} synthesis of various ^{vearis} arts in his creative output. He transferred the principles and terms of musical composition into his ^{symbolist} paintings.

Those who came in contact with Ciurlionis during his time noticed immediately that here was an extraordinary personality. Ciurlionis or his work was well known to many influential persons of his time. Among those who held Ciurlionis in high esteem were Scriabin, Gorky, Pasternak, Blok; Romain Rolland, Stravinsky, Isadora Duncan, to mention a few. Maxim Gorky wrote in a letter to Bogorodsky: "Yes, my dear friend, everyday life and ^{zaije} genre and the other things - all this is fine. But where is the dream? Where is the dream and fantasy, I ask You? Why don't we have Ciurlionesses? This is, indeed, musical painting..." From the letter of Romain Roland to the artist's widow Sofija: "It is impossible for me to express how moved I have been by this truly magic art which has enriched not only painting, but also human vision, polyphony and musical rhythm. This is a continent for the spirit and Ciurlionis is its Christopher Columbus". Nikolaj Berdiajev, having just seen Ciurlionis' works compares him with Picasso: "In Ciurlionis, we experience the elevation of things to a different plane. In Picasso, the borders of physical matter are in flux". Diaghilev and Stravinsky wanted to interest Ciurlionis in painting for the stage.

The most erudite and academic member of the Russian Symbolist movement, Viacheslav Ivanov, says: "The visionary art of Ciurlionis borders on clairvoyance. His spiritual nature is most appealing and convincing when he surrenders himself to his gift of dual perception. His cosmic and supernatural perception earns for Ciurlionis' art an important place in the history of visionary art. For it is impossible not to see that the pathos of this artist is not the pathos of a dream or illusion; it is a profession de foi of his Weltanschauung, a confession of his inner vision, the voice of that spirit in man which Dante called spiriti del viso. As a visionary artist he was endowed with the memory of myth. The images and symbols he used have not yet been forgotten by any of us.

For the source of his painting, as a study of his work confirms, is visual reality. From this reality he aspires to spheres that are already unreal and which he sees beyond the boundaries of reality: he ascends from ordinary reality to that which is most real - he sketches something insignificant and humble (a hut or a tree), as if it were the scale for something great and cosmically solemn which will develop from reality when the ^{seraph} touches his "prophetic eye". How and by what law does something distant and significant grow out of a familiar and trifling thing ? In my opinion, says Ivanov, his method is the artistic treatment of the elements of visual perception according to a principle of music. The use of this musical method serves Ciurlionis as a key which helps him to open the forbidden repositories of the mysteries of the universe. It seems that he begins to grasp the mystery of the genesis of all forms and their essence. His paintings become an attempt to explain and interpret the universe. The principle of musical analogy becomes for Ciurlionis a revelation of the coexistence of our universe with other universes, which, with their unseen vigor and ^{archeform}, reveal themselves to us as tangible reality. It is as if the artist had in his creative dream a vision of a Cosmic Soul - a vague vision of its noonday ^{au} drowsiness, when the universe again becomes disordered not in the primordial chaos ^{god} but in a musical and harmonious combination, where all that has been separated by space is reunited according to the secret principle of innate relationship and conformity. Everything in this world is looking for its counterpart and rejoices upon finding it, and reveals in conformity, unification, and consonance.

There can be no doubt that Ciurlionis was a musician. He was a musician not because of his special training, but the musical element seems to fill his inner self and concentrate mainly, strange as it may seem, on the centers of his visual perceptions. He did not create music, but music created visions within him".

Vytautas Lansbergis, the lyder of lithuanian movement for independence and also famous Ciurlionis scholar, says, that Ciurlionis work is psychological. His music alone is a goldmine for observers of the development and phenomenology of the psychology of creativity. This is also the road to the understanding of Man. If Man, having created society and himself within that society, at least subconsciously retains the primordial elements of his world-view along with a few persistent questions, then art serves as a constant reminder, a signal. Such a signal can be rhythm, the relationship between two rhythms or colors, a line and its place, intonation. Their meaning is intuitive, it speaks for itself. It is then that we see, or to be more precise - hear, that Ciurlionis' music is replete with signals emanating from the very depths of human existence.

The piano was the most beloved instrument of Ciurlionis. Though less familiar, the piano pieces illustrate the full evolution of Ciurlionis' musical style and provide the perspective needed to evaluate his place among European composers at the turn of the century.

As a student, Ciurlionis employed a style that conformed to the conventions of the Classic-Romantic era. The evolution of his musical style undergoes a period of transition from 1901 to 1904. During these years, he refines the characteristics of his compositions into a more individual language. During this period his music emphasizes shorter, motivic themes, chromatic counterpoint. He exhibits for the first time a style influenced by the Lithuanian folk music. The final stages in the evolution of Ciurlionis' style occur in the period 1904-1909. Now he began to search for a new means of expression that resulted in radical departures from conventional harmonic practice. His instances of atonal writing are historically significant because they occurred concurrently with the tonal experiments of the Viennese composers Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. *In spite of all the changes, his music always remains simple, clear and profound at the same time.*

Ciurlionis' name means "ripple, pearl". And his music is like meditative sounds of spring, which spout of very depths of inner nature. Let's listen to them.