

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) — Selected Preludes

The Lithuanian painter, Čiurlionis, is practically unknown in the modern world for his work as a composer, the majority of his works for piano exist as preludes or other miniature forms. Čiurlionis is now considered to be one of the pioneers of abstract art in Europe, and in his short life, Čiurlionis acted as one of the brightest luminaries of Lithuanian national movement. He produced about three hundred paintings, many of which named after musical forms. Čiurlionis' compositional style is similar to that of early Scriabin, taking the romantic salon style of Chopin as the ideal.

Prelude in b minor, VL 182a (1900–1902)

This prelude is written in a grand march-funèbre style, a proud melody is supported by sonorous bass chords. A more flowing middle section then invites the return of the first theme. Čiurlionis perhaps found inspiration from Chopin's c minor prelude, from the Op. 28 cycle.

Prelude in F-sharp '*Angelus Domini*', VL 184 (1901)

Now taking the religious inspiration of late Liszt, Čiurlionis subtitled this prelude '*Angelus Domini*', meaning 'Angel of the Lord'. Through the mellow and smooth melody, complimented by warm supporting chords and bell-like effect continues through the entire prelude, Čiurlionis' message of tranquillity is clear.

Prelude in C, VI 318 (1908)

The first of a cycle entitled 'Sea Preludes', Čiurlionis' harmonic language becomes more advanced and experimental. The waves of the sea are clearly presented in the constantly swirling accompanying figurations. The prelude ends seemingly in the key of A major, before an abrupt reversion to C major. Despite ending in C major, the tonal centre of the prelude is not settled, and the majority is actually written in a minor key.

Prelude in B, VL 186 (1901)

This prelude most clearly shows the influence of Scriabin on Čiurlionis' work as a composer. An elegant melody and luxurious texture are presented from the onset, with outbursts of more dramatic moods.