

ONDINE

TĀLIVALDIS ĶENIŅŠ

Symphonies Nos. 4 & 6

Canzona Sonata

Santa Vižine, *viola*

Latvian National Symphony Orchestra

Guntis Kuzma





TĀLIVALDIS ĶENIŅŠ

TĀLIVALDIS ĶENIŅŠ (1919–2008)

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|---|---|--------------|
| | Symphony No. 4 (1972) | 23:16 |
| 1 | I. Lento – Molto animato – Piu tranquillo – Lento | 12:52 |
| 2 | II. Presto – Adagio – Con brio – Lento subito | 10:24 |
| 3 | Symphony No. 6, "Sinfonia ad Fugam" (1978) | 18:02 |
| | Moderato – Prestissimo – Adagio – Vivace | |
| 4 | Canzona Sonata (1986) | 11:22 |
| | for viola and string orchestra | |

Santa Vižine, viola (4)

LATVIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
GUNTIS KUZMA, conductor

Tālvāldis Ķeniņš is one of Latvia's most important composers, an individual inclined to Neoromanticism, plain-spoken, and full of vitality, in addition to being a composer of great technical virtuosity. Born in Latvia, educated in France, he lived the remainder of his life in Canada.

Ķeniņš, one of Canada's most performed composers, taught for many years in the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto. A full professor since 1973, he was also active in the Canadian League of Composers, its president for two years, the subject of many radio broadcasts, and a member of countless musical juries. Ķeniņš' achievements have been recognised by both the university and the Canadian government. During his lifetime, a street in the Ottawa suburb of Kanata was even named in his honour.

Ķeniņš' body of work comprises mainly instrumental music including eight symphonies, symphonic miniatures, more than ten instrumental concertos, an impressive array of chamber music, piano, and organ works, as well as solo and choral pieces, three cantatas, and an oratorio.

Ķeniņš' parents were Atis Ķeniņš and Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa. His father, a Neoromantically inclined poet, was also a keen politician, his mother a notable social activist. As a teenager, Tālvāldis received his baccalaureate from the Lycée Champollion in Grenoble, subsequently beginning his musical studies in Rīga. However, neither his ability, nor drive were remarkable at this stage. Ķeniņš would later write that he took his first steps in music as a "first-rate ugly duckling".

His abilities, knowledge, and talent bloomed at the Paris Conservatory which he attended after fleeing Latvia shortly before the second Soviet invasion, along with thousands of other members of the Latvian intelligentsia. Ķeniņš' father had already been arrested by the Soviets in 1940 and later deported. Tālvāldis was to have met his mother in Berlin at the end of the war, but that never came to be. He was conscripted into the military, serving as an army organist and clerk, while his mother took ill and returned to Latvia occupied by the Soviets. The experience of war and the urgent need to leave his homeland marked Tālvāldis Ķeniņš indelibly

for the rest of his life: "In the hell of Pomerania, I vowed that if I were to ever get out of here, I would head for Paris, regardless of what might become of me."

In Paris, Ķeniņš studied composition with Tony Aubin, musical theory with Simone Plé-Caussade, and analysis with Olivier Messiaen. After graduation, Aubin presented him with a photograph inscribed "To Tālivaldis, who is both my son and my brother." Simone Plé-Caussade remembers Ķeniņš as a real Parisian with a somewhat brusque manner but a wonderful heart. These three outstanding teachers were the force that decisively changed Ķeniņš' musical thinking.

His schooling in Grenoble and later studies in Paris permanently imbued his signature style with a Cartesian attitude. He came to believe that truth and value only come through that which is constructed with the utmost logic and rationality. A laconic style of expression became his motto, and at his core he remained a Latvian composer and not a French composer. In an interview at the age of thirty, Ķeniņš said, "While working with some young, very gifted Romanian and Hungarian composers, I came to the conclusion that through interaction with French methods, the national element in the art of these two nations acquires new foundations, new rights, and a new affirmation of their existence. It is my conviction that I will not be an exception."

Still, in his rationally constructed works, Ķeniņš rarely remains at the surface level of the music although there are such examples. It is almost always worthwhile for listeners to consider what kind of lived, remembered, imaginative, or emotional realms the composer drew on as inspiration for a particular work. In his notes on one chamber work, Ķeniņš wrote, "In my music the listener can hear whatever they like: be it nature with its never-ending transformations and dominion over us; my personal emotions of peace in my soul or existential anxiety, the vagaries of human destinies, or finally the tragic destiny, unrest, and hardships of our nation. The creative process can never fully be defined or explained. As Boulez said in a different musical context, 'In the beginning there is darkness, shadow, then clarity, structure, and details are revealed, and finally ... there is a return to darkness,

because ultimately there is no explaining a musical work's deepest spiritual being or meaning."

In person, Tālivaldis Ķeniņš was somewhat brusque and direct, but also warm-hearted. He valued his family highly – the wonderful Valda he married in Paris and who gave birth to his two sons. After Grenoble, he enjoyed alpine skiing, but also played tennis and avidly followed hockey. He loved to travel, was fascinated by high speed rail, enjoyed bridge puzzles, appreciated old French films, even though composing remained his true pastime.

Ķeniņš considered chamber music as the highest form of music. In his musical language, he has been described as a "contemporary romantic" and a "conservative modernist". The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians makes a remark on its structural clarity and masterful use of counterpoint. In her expansive book, *Starp divām pasaulēm* [Between Two Worlds], the noted Latvian musical historian Ingrīda Zemzare provides a compelling analysis of his love of fugue and the concertante principle.

Ķeniņš was highly respected in Canada which is reflected in the countless obituaries found in newspapers as well as on the internet. Today, the composer is deserving a wider commemoration in Latvia where his significance still waits to be appreciated and the full body of his work illuminated. A crucial point is that Ķeniņš' music is timeless.

Ondine has previously released Tālivaldis Ķeniņš' First Symphony, Concerto da Camera No. 1, and the Concerto for Piano, Strings, and Percussion in an earlier album. This second release provides a meeting place for his Fourth Symphony (1972), Sixth Symphony (1978), and *Canzona Sonata* for viola and strings (1986). Whenever I find myself needing to say something about Ķeniņš' symphonies, his warning that "the symphony must be pure music in abstract form" comes to mind.

The conversation should stop here, even though the works on this album do invite some commentary.

The Fourth Symphony and the *Canzona Sonata* are linked with the Latvian Song Festival tradition which dates to 1873, when Latvia was under Tsarist Russian rule and choirs from across the country gathered in Latvia's largest city to sing together. Over time song festivals became a marker of national identity and from the 1920s onward took place at more frequent intervals. A five-year cycle was instituted during the Soviet occupation with up to 15,000 participants at the largest festivals.

At the end of World War II, close to 200,000 Latvians went into exile to Europe, America, and Australia in an effort to escape the second Soviet occupation. For the next half century, song festivals were held in both Soviet Latvia and in exile. In both cases, song festivals served as a foundation for identity maintenance. We owe a debt of gratitude to the song festival organisers who commissioned a significant number of vocal-symphonic and symphonic works from prominent exile composers including, of course, Tālvāldis Ķeniņš.

Symphony No. 4 (1972)

Tālvāldis Ķeniņš composed his Fourth Symphony with the support of the Canada Arts Council for the Third Latvian Song Festival in Europe, held in Köln in 1973, to honour the centenary of the first song festival. The premiere took place at the Gürzenich concert hall in Köln, performed by the Avon Chamber Ensemble under the direction of modernist Latvian composer Gundaris Pone, with one instrument per part.

The composer himself has remarked on the chamber music-like character of this symphony, noting a certain resemblance with Darius Milhaud's six symphonies, composed though in a very different musical language.

It is likely that here, more than in any of his other works, Ҡeniņš defers to the inspiration of the orchestra and the conductor, offering them several aleatoric passages of relative freedom with the outcome entirely dependent on their imagination and emotional disposition. Ҡeniņš chose flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, trumpet, trombone, percussion and strings, and included parts for two violins, viola, and cello. There is no information to explain why there is no bass part. The symphony is in two parts.

We hear a quiet and mystical cluster at the opening of the first part. Conductor Guntis Kuzma compares the slow progressive bass drum beats to a kind of musical shamanism. More clearly perceptible harmonies gradually emerge, the rhythm constricts, and there is a build-up of energy which is released around 05:05 with abrupt dissonant chords and boom of the tam-tam.

The *molto animato* (very lively) section begins at 06:01 with repetitious string sounds creating a mechanistic impression. Guntis Kuzma compares this stringed aggression to a mob, with the winds endeavouring to voice objections. However, it is not for long, as the roles are then reversed.

At 11:25 the composer directs the musicians to microtonal changes in pitch by altering their breath and embouchure (winds) or simultaneously adjusting their left hand and bow positions (strings), thus creating a uniquely eerie atmosphere found only in this symphony.

Around 00:30 of the second part, it might be possible to discern an echo of the *dies irae* motif. Another wonderful example of the aleatoric occurs around 01:55, as the instrumental voices attempt to shout each other, all the while making use of only one pitch. Around 03:04 a state reminiscent of the first part comes into being, at approximately the place of the golden ratio in the symphonic structure. A sense of weightlessness can be enjoyed around 07:25, followed by total but precisely organised chaos, ultimate instability until a well-nurtured thunderclap heralds the arrival of the final section, when the shamanic vision brings everything to a halt. The composer's notes in the score indicate that he is

calling for a sense of frozenness. The musicians are to remain in place with their bows in the air as they stop playing. In this recording, the conductor and bass drum player agreed the percussionist would choose the timing of the final drum beat. Time stops still. Like a stop shot.

It is possible the Fourth has become Җeniņš' most performed symphony, appreciated also outside the Latvian community. The composer himself acknowledged the Köln performance was its weakest but fortunately the work was also performed in February of 1974, by the Belgian Radio and Television Chamber Orchestra under Fernand Terby in New York, Hamilton and Toronto. In January 1975, a recording of it directed by Lazslo Gati was broadcast on the Canadian Composers Workshop programme on the CBC network together with works by André Prévost and Barbara Pentland and commentary by the composer. In 1976, the Fourth Symphony was released on an album recorded by the Vancouver Symphony under the baton of John Avison.

During the dress rehearsal in Köln, it was discovered that the music for the percussion instruments had disappeared and the composer had to reconstruct them in a few hours in his hotel room. (It should also be noted this was not the only disappearance of music that occurred at this festival and we might guess that this might have had something to do with certain attitudes held by some of Җeniņš' countrymen toward his avant-garde music.)

It is interesting that Җeniņš once said with characteristic self-deprecating irony: "I am fond of all the possibilities of the percussion instruments. It adds so much colour. It adds a dynamic profile to my music – kind of a purpose in itself. It underlies all the dramatic elements which take place in a composition, in an orchestral piece. I think I discovered these things in my Symphony No. 4 which is really a concerto for percussion. It is not as Boulez said, criticising the improper use of percussion instruments. He was saying that percussion instruments were a 'cache-misère' ... something to hide the misery and paucity of the music."

It is possible that one or two Latvians in Germany or America might have had similar thoughts, since the Latvian community newspapers supplied commentary that called contemporary music a cheap trick along with references from Spengler who was quoted as comparing modernists with circus performers who pretend to lift heavy barbells that are really made of paper. In this case, we can each remain with our own thoughts.

Symphony No. 6, "*Sinfonia ad fugam*" (1978)

In 1978, the National Arts Centre Orchestra commissioned Tālivaldis Ķeniņš to compose his Sixth Symphony which he wrote that summer at his cottage on the Great Lakes. He called it the *Sinfonia ad fugam*. This work is a declaration of his love for Johann Sebastian Bach, who Ķeniņš had since his early years considered to be his greatest teacher. His record collection contained many recordings of Bach and it is no wonder that Ķeniņš' work features so much polyphony – fugues, fugato, canon. In his graduating year, Ķeniņš received a mark of 5+ (in the five-point system) for his fugue, the highest mark Jāzeps Vītols, the father of Latvian professional music, ever gave to any student in this discipline.

We can read the composer's commentary in the score: "Since my early acquaintance (and durable love) with the music of J.S. Bach, I have always been fascinated by the C sharp minor fugue of Book I of the *Wohltemperiertes Klavier*. Besides loving to play it as written, I used to extemporize around the four-note subject and its two counter-subjects, imagining other possible expressions of this thematic material. Later, possibly under the analytical spell of my teacher Messiaen, I started to picture this material through an orchestral tapestry, surrounded by a variety of canonic rhythms, thicker sonority patches and juxtaposition of tension/release effects of a more dramatic nature. Quite needless, of course, for the admirer of the genial piece of music in its original form, if we are to believe that someone is attempting to improve on Bach. However,

if we remember that this sublime subject C#-B#-E-D# (in fact, an expansion of the famous B-A-C-H motif) has also captivated the imagination of Beethoven, Wagner, Franck, Richard Strauss and many others, it would not be inappropriate to consider that this composer too has found in Bach's original material (often used in 'collage' with the rest) a most inspiring departure point for his own kind of musical drama.

As the four moments, performed without break, fit into traditional pattern of a symphony, SINFONIA AD FUGAM seem to be a suitable designation for the work, admittedly not of Mahlerian dimensions though. To be quite frank, this title is also related to Palestrina's Mass of the same name, whose richness in canonic devices (it was also called *Missa ad canones*) gave me many practical suggestions and (dignified) contrapuntal means to create a rational outline for my often nebulous and wild fantasies... on a theme."

Keņiņš told his biographer, the flautist and composer Edgars Kariks that his Sixth Symphony is his shortest symphony and his best work. "Quoting Bach has been fruitful – symbolizing the spirit of music itself, as I see it."

The first part of the Sixth Symphony begins from nowhere. The strings gradually form a cluster, the winds providing a fugal theme a half tone below Bach's. It starts with the contrabassoon, continuing with the bass clarinet, the bassoon, the French horn, etc. The sunken cathedral slowly rises and there is a sense of Bach-like ceremony in this work, related in spirit just a little to some pages from the *Mass in B minor*.

The symphony's second part begins around 04:54 with a tempo marking of *prestissimo*, or very fast. The edifice's raw materials and binding material consists of Bach's fugal strands concentrated in small, glimmering units. Polyphony at top speed is an exhilarating symphonic experience.

The third part of the symphony begins at 08:00 and here we enter an otherworldly atmosphere. The fugal theme is expressed at Bach's chosen pitches, albeit written with flats, rather than sharps. Around 11:00, the string musicians

begin to hum, choosing any of the pitches they are playing on their instruments. This continues for almost a minute, followed by one of the most beautiful climaxes to be found in Ҡeniņš' work and arguably even in any late twentieth century symphonic work.

The symphony's fourth part begins around 14:04 with a tempo marking of *vivace ma non troppo* (lively, but not too much). In the beginning it promises a brisk, lively, slightly aggressive experience, but its mystical side begins to imperceptibly take the upper hand. Instead of arriving at a precisely defined viewpoint, the marimba's high register monologue and the humming of the string players, joined in the last bar by the entire orchestra, returns us to the original, diffuse state of liminality, which speaks to us with incomplete words, premonitions, and has the ability to make us happy.

Following its premiere, the *Ottawa Citizen* music critic Ruth Francis wrote of a pale, northern sun exploding into a world of space exploration, but here again we find ourselves returning to descriptions of music – specifically, descriptions of Ҡeniņš' music. It is very tempting to swathe works such as the Sixth Symphony (or, for example, *Beatae voces tenebrae*) into epithets and similes but the work itself will always rise above.

The premiere took place on May 16, 1972, at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, performed by the National Arts Centre Orchestra under Boyd Neel.

Canzona Sonata (1986)

The *Canzona Sonata* was commissioned in 1986 by the organising committee of the Australian Latvian Culture Days for performance that same year in Adelaide. The work was performed by the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra directed by cellist and conductor Jānis Lauris with Andra Dārziņa as viola soloist. The work was dedicated to Andra Dārziņa, at that time a member of the Berlin Philharmonic.

Ķeniņš called this work an instrumental song and this is an excellent example of how a small seed (a minor second) with which the cellos open, taken over by the solo viola, can build an impressive edifice.

Guntis Kuzma notes that, "You can speak of a certain sonata-like character here, if you take the initial monologue as the main part and the second thematic zone (around 04:04) as the secondary part. The composer is virtuosic in his ability to effect change in the relationship between the viola and the other instruments. At one moment the violist is anchored to the orchestra, at another sailing into space. This music has unending expanses and variable temperature zones ranging from zones of coolness to flaming fires. Personality comes from the orchestra via the first violin solo (starting around 04:37) performed on this recording by Raimonds Ozols, Principal of the 1st violins of the LNSO. The final segment (begins around 09:00), is something like an ascent to the heavens, leading us to the conclusion in C major. The low string chords remain but the viola is high in the sky – there where none of us have ever set foot."

Ķeniņš once said of one of his works, "Don't go looking for any deep meaning, there isn't any here." This is wonderful advice – simply listen to Ķeniņš' music and enjoy!

Orests Silabriedis

(Translation: Dace Veinberga)



Santa Vižine was born in Riga. She graduated from the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Music Academy in 2011. The violist is a laureate of several Latvian and international competitions.

In December 2017 Santa Vižine joined the Concertgebouworkest. From 2009 to the 2016/17 season, she was principal violist of Gidon Kremer's chamber orchestra Kremerata Baltica.

As a soloist Santa Vižine has performed with Sinfonia Concertante and Kremerata Baltica. She has also played with the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, the Gothenburg Symphony and Sinfonietta Riga. Festival appearances include the Lockenhaus festival, the Wiener Festwochen, La Folle Journée in Nantes, the Enescu Festival in Bucharest and Chamber Music Connects the World in Kronberg, Germany, where she played alongside Kim Kashkashian, Steven Isserlis, Christian Tetzlaff and Gidon Kremer.

The Latvian National Symphony Orchestra is one of the cornerstones of Latvian national culture, its history spans almost a century. The LNSO is a six-time winner of the Latvian Grand Music Award. Since 2013, the music director of the LNSO is maestro Andris Poga, a conductor sought after by top orchestras from around the world.

The orchestra's most notable former music directors include Jānis Mediņš, Leonīds Vīgners, Edgars Tons, Vassily Sinaisky, Olari Elts, and Karel Mark Chichon. The orchestra has participated in music festivals in France, Germany and Switzerland as well as the Bratislava Music Festival. On its most recent tours the LNSO teamed up with world-renowned soloists such as Latvian violinist Baiba Skride, cellist Alexander Knyazev, pianists Nicholas Angelich, Boris Berezovsky, Lukas Geniušas and Lucas Debargue.

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Guntis Kuzma was appointed conductor of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra starting the 2014/2015 season. Other appearances include frequent collaborations with chamber orchestras Sinfonietta Rīga and Sinfonia Concertante, the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music (JVLMA) Symphony Orchestra, and the Latvian Festival Orchestra. Kuzma received Latvia's Grand Music Award in 2018 for outstanding interpretation of Ādolfs Skulte's Symphony No. 5 with the LNSO, as well as for his solo in Sebastian Fagerlund's Clarinet Concerto with Sinfonietta Rīga and conductor Normunds Šnē.

Kuzma is former principal clarinetist of the LNSO (2008–2014) and the Sinfonietta Rīga chamber orchestra since it was established in 2006 until 2015. Kuzma is both lecturer and former Head of the Department of Wind Instruments at the JVLMA Academy. Besides being an active participant in chamber music projects, Kuzma also enjoys performing contemporary music. He has participated in the first performances of numerous new works both as clarinetist and conductor.

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TĀLIVALDIS ĶENIŅŠ (1919–2008)

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