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Seeking Unity and Cyclical Consistency in Performing Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis's 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10: Sea Etudes'

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The article revisits the question of whether the piano works by Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) can be understood as components of larger cycles – an issue brought to the fore by scholars Vytautas Landsbergis, Darius Kučinskas, and Rimantas Janeliauskas, among others. Building on Janeliauskas's concept of 'cyclicality' within Čiurlionis's oeuvre – particularly his notion of 'unrecognised cycles', a term coined by the musicologist himself – the author investigates how performers might approach one of these, namely, 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10: Sea Etudes', both in compliance with a series of characteristics of music and through concrete actions by a performer, so that it can be actually perceived as a musical cycle by the listener.

KEYWORDS: Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, unrecognised cycles, 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10: Sea Etudes', musical cycles, cyclicality

Introduction

The creative work of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) offers a kaleidoscope of images, tunes, and sensations unified by a syncretic worldview. Enlivened by an interest in cosmology, astrology and spiritual subjects, the composer's achievements in the fields of both music and painting remain among the most complex contributions by a European artist and continue to attract scholarly attention. One of the most debated aspects of his musical output concerns the principles behind the process of composition of his more than three hundred piano works. Many of these pieces remain unfinished and are characterised by significant differences in form and style despite being composed over a relatively short time span, approximately between 1896 to 1909, when his final, monumental Fugue in B flat minor emerged. Central to this discussion is the question of whether some of these compositions were conceived as parts of larger cycles. Vytautas Landsbergis, one of the leading voices on this subject, has argued that cyclical thinking is intrinsic to all aspects of Čiurlionis's artistic output, acting as a common thread across his oeuvre: his works are intertwined by a profound, holistic penchant, resulting in 'the creation of his own individual artistic world from the forms and colours of the surrounding

objective world.'[1]

Determining what constitutes the definition of a 'musical cycle' can lead to varied interpretations when it comes to Čiurlionis's piano music, depending on the criteria applied to establish links between different works. To begin with, several pieces show unquestionable harmonic and thematic (in a musical sense) unity: for example, those created between May and June of 1906 (VL 294–296, 305, 297), which are based on the same A–B–D series, reworked in the form of free variations, as identified by Rimantas Janeliauskas.[2] More diverse criteria of structural constructivism, such as complex intervallic relationships, trends of expanded tonality, symmetry and proportionality, as well as aspects of seriality, have also been noted as unifying traits in Čiurlionis's later works between 1904 to 1909 by Audronė Jurkėnaitė.[3] Last but not least, several compositions explicitly convey cyclical wholeness, as the existing sets of variations, including 'Sefaa Esec' VL 258 and 'Besacas' VL 265 of 1904, among others.

The contributions of the editors of Čiurlionis's music are of great significance in this area: their comparative analyses – searching for congruity between different compositions, based on chronological, structural and stylistic criteria – have led to the idea of 'groupable' works in light of a verisimilar 'cyclicality'.[4] This is evident in the scores within publications by Jadvyga Čiurlionytė (*Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Kūriniai fortepijonui*, 1957), Landsbergis (*Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Kūriniai fortepijonui. Visuma*, 2004), and Darius Kučinskas (*Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Kūriniai fortepijonui. Urtekstai*, 2014). Among the more recent releases, *Mažoji sonata. Mūsų dainelė* (Little Sonata. Our Little Song, 2021) by Landsbergis and pianist Rokas Zubovas, which brings together VL 269–271 in a way that recalls the form of a traditional sonata is also worth noting. Similarly, Kučinskas's *Chronologinis M. K. Čiurlionio muzikos katalogas* (Chronologic Catalogue of M. K. Čiurlionis's Music, 2025) classifies Čiurlionis's piano works by the year of composition, allowing for further insight into elements of cyclicality through their chronological sequence.

Janeliauskas provided one of the most extensive studies in this area. His *Neatpažinti Mikalojaus Konstantino Čiurlionio muzikos ciklai* (Unrecognised Music Cycles of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, 2010) stands out as a comprehensive examination of Čiurlionis's piano compositions in light of a hypothesised cyclicality, revealed through recurring leitmotifs in the composer's creative process as summarised in the following paragraphs. The musicologist's theorised criteria of cyclicality have proven appealing to academic performers. Since the 2020 edition, the research conference *Principles of Music Composition*, hosted annually by the Lithuanian

1 '[...] individualaus meno pasaulio tvėrimas iš supančio objektyvaus pasaulio formų ir spalvų'. Landsbergis 1976: 124.

2 Janeliauskas 2006: 31.

3 Jurkėnaitė 2001: 51.

4 This term and its derivations will be used to refer to the characteristic of belonging to a musical cycle.

Academy of Music and Theatre in Vilnius, has featured concerts in which students from the Piano Department perform Čiurlionis's piano works as 'Unrecognised Cycles'. Moreover, Lithuanian pianist Jurgis Karnavičius has also recorded and released several of these works in the album *Neatpažinti Mikalojaus Konstantino Čiurlionio muzikos ciklai* (2019), which was promoted in the concert series *Čiurlionis kitaip* (Čiurlionis Differently) across various cultural venues in Lithuania.

Nevertheless, a study from a performer's perspective, particularly one focused on building coherent unity when performing Čiurlionis's piano compositions as musical cycles, thus enabling the listener to experience them as a cohesive whole rather than disconnected works, seems to be missing from academic work to date. The article, therefore, explores this dimension of interpreting Čiurlionis's pianistic oeuvre: it lays out a theoretical framework concerning the musical narrative, identifies relevant features of his cyclical works in this regard, and considers the potential role of the performer's interpretive choices in this field. To this end, 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10: Sea Etudes' (Neatpažintas ciklas X: Jūros etiudai) will serve as a case study.

1. Narrative in Instrumental Music: Representation and Thematic Unity

The idea that instrumental music can convey narrativity often arises when discussing nineteenth- and twentieth-century music. This epoch witnessed, above all, a significant upheaval in the relationship between drama and music, substantiated by a wealth of essays by composers, critics, and philosophers. As is well known, the musical environment of the time could be broadly divided into two camps: the advocates of 'pure music' and the so-called 'Wagnerites', promoters of what the composer Richard Wagner would call *Gesamtkunstwerk* – the 'total work of art' – which aimed to synthetise drama and music, in contrast to traditional opera, which privileged music over dramatic content.

In general, generations of composers found it difficult to fully break free from the conventions of opera while attempting to redefine the relationship between their musical intentions and dramatic inclinations. More radical than Wagner in their explorations were two exponents of the Second Viennese School, Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) and Alban Berg (1885–1935), who sought to dismantle the conventional bonds between narrative and music. Their efforts resulted in ground-breaking compositions such as *Erwartung* (Expectation) Op. 17 (1924) and

Wozzeck (1925), respectively.[5] Conversely, several others found alternative ways to allow their musical and narrative penchants to coexist. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries also witnessed a flourishing of programme music – a multifaceted genre shaped by national contexts but united by the intent to convey a narrative subject (e.g., a poem, a landscape, or a historic event) through pure musical means.

However, it must be emphasised that the mere evocation of or reference to extra-musical subjects is not sufficient to qualify as narrativity in music. Narrative is a fundamentally logical process, involving not only the representation of events but also the disclosure of their temporal and causal relationships. As George Wilson argues, 'a genuine narrative requires the representation of a minimum of two events and some indication of the ordering in time of the events depicted.'[6] Noël Carroll adds that 'the basis of the narrative connection is that earlier events and states of affairs are at least causally necessary conditions, or contributions thereto, for the occurrence of later events in the relevant stories.'[7] A similar logic can certainly be traced within musical compositions: musical events, such as the repetition of a motif, the arrival of a climax, or a modulation, occur in a sequence determined by the composer, and their causal relationships may adhere to tonal rules of tonality or other aesthetic criteria. Conversely, not all instrumental music fulfils the condition of 'representation of events', as much of it exists for its own sake.

Taking Čiurlionis's 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10' as an example, such incongruity becomes evident. As observed elsewhere, Čiurlionis offers a vivid portrayal of the sea through recurring stylistic features, 'most frequently employed to convey a variety of characteristics of water imagery.'[8] However, a purely pictorial intent does not suffice to convey narration in relation to the subject. In other words, the musical depiction of the sea does not imply its involvement in a narrative dynamic.

Jerrold Levinson notes that in cases such as this, a dramatic rather than a narrative model may better apply. Drawing from Aristotle's (384–322 BCE) *Poetics* (*c*. 334–330 BCE), Levison recalls the distinction that, in a narrative model, events are *narrated*, whereas in a dramatic model, they are *enacted*.[9] Based on this, the core of representation in Čiurlionis's 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10' may not be a narration of 'sea-related *events*', but rather an enactment – music itself

5 In *Erwartung* Schoenberg discloses a complex psychological drama for a single female voice performer, resulting in an extraordinary dilation of time: the composer revealed how the aim was 'to represent in slow motion everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement, stretching it out to half an hour' (in Stein 1984: 105). Conversely, in *Wozzeck* Berg employs closed forms deduced from instrumental music, such as preludes, fugues and rondos, in substitution of the conventional operatic forms as arias, duos and trios.

6 Wilson 2003: 393.

7 Carroll 2001: 133.

8 De Martino 2020: 181.

9 Levinson 2004: 435.

'impersonating' or evoking the sea through selected musical devices, which become the agents of representation.

A similar approach can be found in the piano music of Claude Debussy (1862–1918). His compositions, evocative of the 'Orient', do not aim to depict specific events; rather, they seek to summon a spectrum of images, sounds, and sensations inherent to it without pursuing 'any focused representation [of some of them in particular], but, in conformity with the composer' symbolistic vein, simply alluding to them by suggesting some of the possible sensations related to them.'[10] No distinct events are, therefore, narrated; instead, music becomes the agent of portrayal, rendering the subject familiar to the listener without referring to any concrete instances of it.

The parallel between composers such as Debussy and Čiurlionis – both highly devoted to the arts of symbolisation and allusion – serves the purpose of this research, as the construction of thematic unity, based on interconnections between purely musical elements that embody subjects and evoke associated sensations, is the prerogative of both. Recurring characteristics of the latter's music are used to portray the sea, as demonstrated in 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10', among others, and as discussed in a previous paper by the author of this article.[11] The shared theme of the sea thus emerges as a key component of what may be termed 'thematic cyclicality' (to be expanded upon in the following paragraphs), while the criteria through which these works can be meaningfully interpreted as a sequence – thanks to the performer's input – will be examined in the next section.

2. Characteristics of Čiurlionis's Piano Cycles Functional to the Expression of 'Cyclical' Unity by a Performer

As Janeliauskas observed, Čiurlionis's piano cycles emerged spontaneously, as a result of the composer's creative outbursts over his lifetime; this idea was previously emphasised by Landsbergis, who also highlighted the concept of cyclicality as expression of the composer's personal emotional and creative path.[12] In other words, although Čiurlionis did not intentionally group these works into cycles (with some exceptions), the lines of continuity can still be drawn between them, as they stem from the same

10 De Martino 2021: 42. It must be said, however, that Debussy and Čiurlionis's ways of portraying reality lay on different premises: Debussy's 'Orient' was not a real place at all but rather a fictional representation of what the 'Orient' would mean and appear to Westerners (although, as is known, the composer himself had multiple chances to listen, for instance, to *Gamelan* music); diversely, Čiurlionis's representations of natural phenomena are deeply rooted in his direct, personal experience of them, such as in the Lithuanian countryside, near the Baltic Sea, and so on).

11 See: De Martino, Vincenzo. The Representation of the Sea in Piano Works by Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. *Ars et Praxis*. 2020. 8: 181–198, for an analysis of the concrete stylistic features of Čiurlionis's piano music functional to the portrayal of the sea and water in general.

12 Landsbergis 2008: 494.

compositional wave. This phenomenon, which is not an isolated case in the history of music composition (examples from other composers will be discussed later), led to what Janeliauskas terms 'spontaneous cycles'.[13] Janeliauskas identifies several characteristics as symptomatic of Čiurlionis's 'spontaneous cyclicality', a key driving force in his artistic parabola. The first is the composer's tendency to produce a conspicuous number of works in a very short time, indicating that he largely followed the inspiration of the moment. As the scholar affirms, Čiurlionis's cycles 'came to reality almost by themselves, adding a piece day in day out.'[14] Janeliauskas further argues that this compositional trend necessarily reflects Čiurlionis's psychological state at the time, which is revealed through the contrasting characters of individual pieces. In this sense, 'spontaneous cycles happen to be a diary of the composer's experiences of psychological transformations, tracking the course of change in states and moods.'[15]Another feature is the absence of titles for many of the compositions. According to Janeliauskas, this anonymity additionally corroborates the idea that these pieces were intended as parts of larger constructs, with their individuality suppressed. That said, some of Čiurlionis's pieces did receive titles from the composer himself, while others appear as sketches with annotations such as numbering (alluding to an intent to group them) or dedications.[16] A third characteristic is the number of unfinished works. The theme of 'unfinishedness' recurs throughout Čiurlionis's artistic output, reflecting his vision of a seamless, lifelong creative process. Čiurlionis himself alluded to the continuous and ceaseless nature of his musical thinking in several of his letters. For instance, in a correspondence with his brother Povilas, he wrote: 'The last cycle [*Creation of the World*] is unfinished, I intend to continue it my whole life'[17], and also: 'I would like to create a cycle of at least 100 paintings, but I do not know if I will.'[18]

According to Janeliauskas, this characteristic ultimately supports the idea of cyclicality, as it suggests that single pieces were not conceived as defined units per se but as phases within an extended musical process. Tonal relationships between works may offer a key to interpreting their cyclical progression: Janeliauskas observes that several of the internal pieces of a cycle end abruptly on unusual cadenzas, which in turn exert a strong pull toward the following piece. Conversely, works with a clear final resolution are typically placed at the end of a cycle.[19] These features provide useful guidance for performers seeking to ensure unity and consistency in interpreting

13 Janeliauskas 2010: 145.

14 'Čiurlionio ciklai dažnai realizuodavosi lyg ir savaime, diena iš dienos užrašant po kūrinį.' Ibid.: 146.

15 'Savaiminis ciklas yra tarsi kompozitoriaus išgyvento psichologinio pakilimo dienoraštis, fiksuojantis būsenų ir nuotaikų kaitos ciklą.' Ibid.: 149.

16 Ibid.: 157.

17 'Paskutinis ciklas nebaigtas, ketinu tapyti jį visą gyvenima.' Druskininkai, 1905.

18 'Norėčiau sukurti bent 100 paveikslų ciklą, ar sukursiu, nežinau.' Ibid.

19 Ibid.: 158–161.

Čiurlionis's musical cycles. The former, related to spontaneity, implies a need for a natural flow from one piece to the next, as though each emerged organically from the conclusion of the previous one. It is the performer's task, therefore, to convey this sense of effortless musical continuity, even if the effect is achieved through meticulous planning.

Other instances from music history can help clarify this phenomenon, for instance, Debussy's *Prèludes*, particularly the very first transition from the first piece, *Danseuses de Delphes* (Dancers of Delphi), to the second, *Voiles* (Sails), in Book 1. The first prelude ends with a clear B-flat chord that freely resonates for nearly two full bars (Example 1a). It is then fundamental that the performer creates the right amount of space between the complete extinction of said chord and the introduction of the main motif of the following prelude, which is based entirely on a whole-tone scale (Example 1b). One of the most refined interpreters of Debussy's piano works, Krystian Zimerman, offers a compelling insight here: he emphasises the G-sharp note at bar 24 of *Danseuses de Delphes*, which also serves as the opening note of *Voiles*.[20] Analogous interpretive choices may help performers connect consecutive works by Čiurlionis, as it will be explored in the following paragraphs.

As Carol Gould and Kenneth Keaton observe, in such instances it is more accurate to speak of 'fluency' rather than 'spontaneity': the transition is in fact carefully planned by the performer in such a way that it sounds natural to the listener. The authors also cite Swedish linguist Carl August Hagberg's assumption that 'musical performance is often construed on the model of a dualistically conceived linguistic utterance, so that we believe there is a direct musical equivalent of linguistic dualism whereby the performer executes a pre-formed musical intention.'[21] In other words, just as fluency is expected in verbal communication, listeners similarly seek this natural flow in musical performance, and it is up to the performer to deliver it.

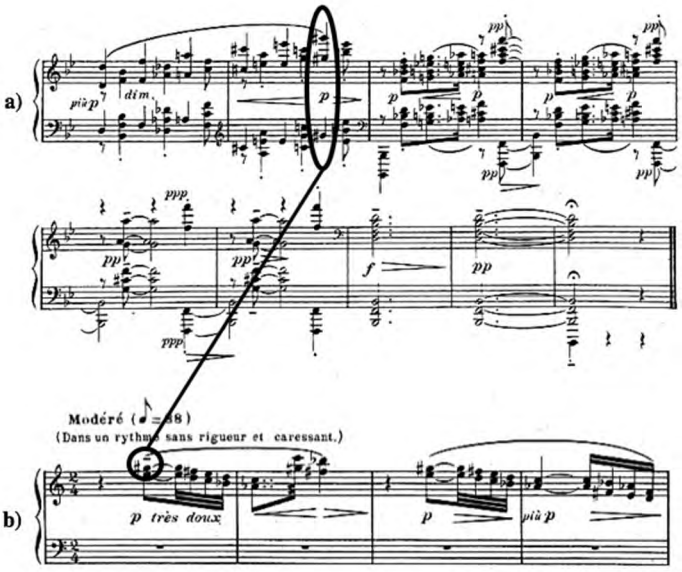
The issue of anonymity also frequently arises in large collections that nevertheless share a common thread. For example, the 28 miniatures in *Música callada* (Silent Music) by Federico Mompou (1893–1987) are the tiles of a magnificent mosaic representing the composer's spiritual and aesthetic journey over the years, in a way reminiscent of Čiurlionis. In the preface, Mompou describes the work as 'the voice itself of silence' and explains how it is meant to maximally resound in one's interiority, when 'solitude becomes music.' In another excerpt, he adds: 'It is quiet because its hearing is internal. [...] Its emotion is secret and only takes shape in its sound echoes under the great vault of our cold loneliness.'[22] Having been composed over an extended period of time (1951–1967) and published in four books between 1959 and 1976,

20 Zimerman, Krystian (1994). *Claude Debussy. The Complete Preludes*. Deutsche Grammophon – 435 773-2.

21 Gould and Keaton 2000: 147.

22 Mompou in Janés 1975: 371.

they were, therefore, hardly conceived as a cycle, although they share the same central ideas, as summarised above. Nevertheless, none of them was given its own title besides a tempo or character indication – perhaps indicating that they were meant to exist only in relation to one another. The shared title and their interwoven nature make the performer's role critical.



Example 1. A possible 'cyclical' connection between *Danseuses de Delphes* and *Voiles* from Book 1 of Claude Debussy's *Prèludes* as revealed by Krystian Zimerman's performance, represented by a prominently resounding G-sharp note at b. 24 of the first (a), building a connection with the opening of the second (b)

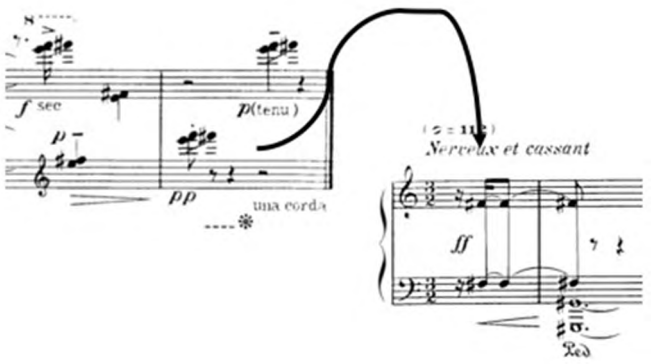
A recital given by the author of the present article on 21 June 21 2021 at the Great Hall of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre in Vilnius, as a part of his Artistic Research Project viva,[23] featured the first and second books of *Música callada* performed separately as two distinguished cycles. The performance was marked by a general tendency to reduce the time between the single pieces to a bare minimum, in a way that facilitated the overall continuity. In addition, it can be perceived how the interpreter opted for two different ways of making the 'interiority to resound', as intended by Mompou, across the two books: more placid and celestial in the first (despite occasional duskier demeanours) and more tormented in the second.[24]

Finally, as noted above, the peculiarity of unfinished pieces lies in their 'open endings', which, in turn, reveal an attraction to the piece that follows. A suite like *Mana* (1935) by the French composer Andrè Jolivet (1905–1974) exemplifies this principle. For instance, the transition from the open ending of *Beaujolais* to the hammered

23 *Interpreting Primitivism in Piano Music of the Twentieth Century*, defended on 21–23 June 21 2021 at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (Vilnius).
https://lmta.lt/en/renginys/vincenzo-de-martino-meno-doktoranturos-projekto-gynimas. Last accessed: 28 April 2025.

24 The full performance is available on the LMTA YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/live/XQVDA-JhtBMY?si=HNTYEIXiBkghe3Zw. Last accessed: 28 April 2025.

initial octave at the right hand in *L'oiseau* (The Bird), both centred on F-sharp note, invites the performer to interpret the link as a question-answer relationship. The final cluster of the first piece seems to 'fly away' in space, only to suddenly 'fall' back to the ground with the opening octave (Example 2). Jolivet further emphasises this continuity with a *crescendo* mark leading into the left-hand octave, which begins from silence, therefore suggesting a continuity with the previous work.



Example 2. A possible connection between the consecutive first and second pieces from the suite *Mana* (1935) by André Jolivet, following a question-answer logic based on the shared F-sharp between the final clusters of the first and the assertive opening octave of the second piece, as explained in the body text

As it has now been established, Janeliauskas's ascertained characteristics, which may be indicative of cyclicality in Čiurlionis's piano works, may be seen as the starting point for a pianist to express cyclic unity through a series of convenient performative inputs based on these musical features. The construction of analogous connections between consecutive pieces in Čiurlionis's piano cycles, as they were acknowledged in other examples from the pianistic literature, will be the focus of the following paragraph, particularly in relation to 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10: *Sea Etudes*', thus disclosing the key characteristics that foster unity and consistency in a 'cyclical' sense.

3. Performance Analysis of Čiurlionis's 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10' Focusing on Unity and Cyclical Consistency

As suggested by several stylistic features, 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10' (VL 309–312–310–311–313–309b) reveals an inextricable link to water and the sea, which the author of this article assessed in an earlier paper, and a first hint of 'thematic cyclicality'.[25] The relationship between the sea and cyclical thinking is a recurring element throughout Čiurlionis's artistic output, notably in *Sonata V. Jūros sonata* (*Sonata of the Sea*, 1908), where the composer pursues the idea of rhythm and movement, as in music, alongside a sense of cosmic depth and unfathomable destiny – feelings germane to his perception of the sea as a subject of artistic representation.

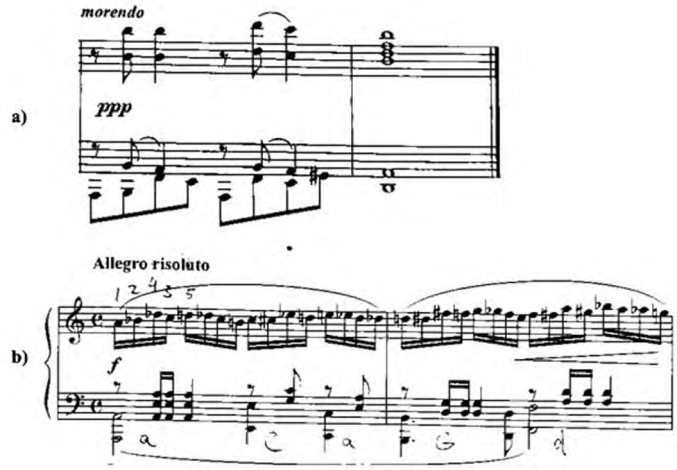
25 The bond between Čiurlionis's art and the sea can be explored in the works by several illustrious scholars who previously addressed this topic in-depth, such as Algirdas Jonas Ambrazas, Jonas Bruveris, Rūta Gaidamavičiūtė, Vytautas Landsbergis, to mention a few, as well as in the composer-painter's own writings.

The works comprising Unrecognised Cycle No. 10, composed in Druskininkai and Warsaw between the summer and autumn of 1907, were often grouped based on their thematic unity even before Janeliauskas formally identified them as such. For instance, in Čiurlionytė's edition they appear as parts of Op. 26 and 27, while Landsbergis included them in a set of eight works (alongside VL 306–308) under the title '*Audros ir gelmės*' (*Storms and Depths)*. As Landsbergis observed, in that same year Čiurlionis completed the orchestration of his symphonic poem *Jūra* (*The Sea*) and worked on his painting cycle *Zodiakas* (*The Zodiac*), further evidencing a profound interpenetration of different art forms and their related spiritual and natural dimensions within the composer's creative process.[26]

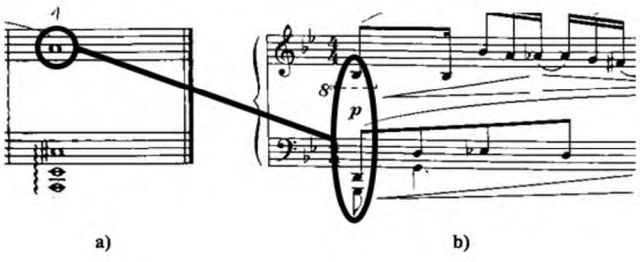
These motifs are crucial when seeking coherence in performing works such as 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10', where the element of the sea is prominent. As previously mentioned, these characteristics confer both thematic unity and semantic congruity. However, they do not necessarily ensure a sense of cyclical wholeness. It falls to the performer, therefore, to devise ways of conveying cyclical consistency throughout the sequence – an issue that will be analysed in the following paragraphs. For instance, the first VL 309 is a slow-moving, homorhythmic series of dissonant chords grouped in two-bar phrases that flow from one into another, giving the impression of 'floating above water' as they are wisely connected through the pedal. The absence of a true climax is compensated by the polyphonic writing, enabling the performer to highlight certain details in the texture from time to time, in such a way as to add vitality to the sound stream. In contrast, the subsequent VL 312 is a thunderous, relentless, 'stormy' chromatic gallop, ultimately serving as a contrasting *intermezzo* episode.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find at least one meaningful connection between the two pieces in terms of cyclical fluency, which is represented by their *tempi* relationship. If the second piece is performed as an *alla breve* version of the first, it is possible to 'trick' the audience into believing they are listening to a variation of the latter. This effect is aided by their symmetrical phrasing and the closeness of the two tonal regions. To support this illusion, it is useful to observe the exact duration of the last chord from VL 309, without indulging in any *fermata*, and minimise the time between the two pieces (Example 3). The linkage between the second and the third pieces initially appears more problematic, as it is necessary to switch from an abrupt, vigorous ending to the sinuosity and, sometimes, solemnity of slow, free-flowing (also similarly 'floating') chromatic lines. Nevertheless, the tonal attraction between the upper note of the final A Major chord from VL 312, which acts as the second grade of a G minor scale, towards the clear initial G–Bb chord from VL 310 (a tonal relationship already identified by Janeliauskas as

26 Preface to *Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Kūriniai fortepijonui. Visuma*.



Example 3. A comparative view of the last two bars of VL 309 (a) and the incipit from VL 312 (b): it is possible to convey a sense of cyclicality by aligning the tempo of VL 312 as *alla breve* relative to VL 309

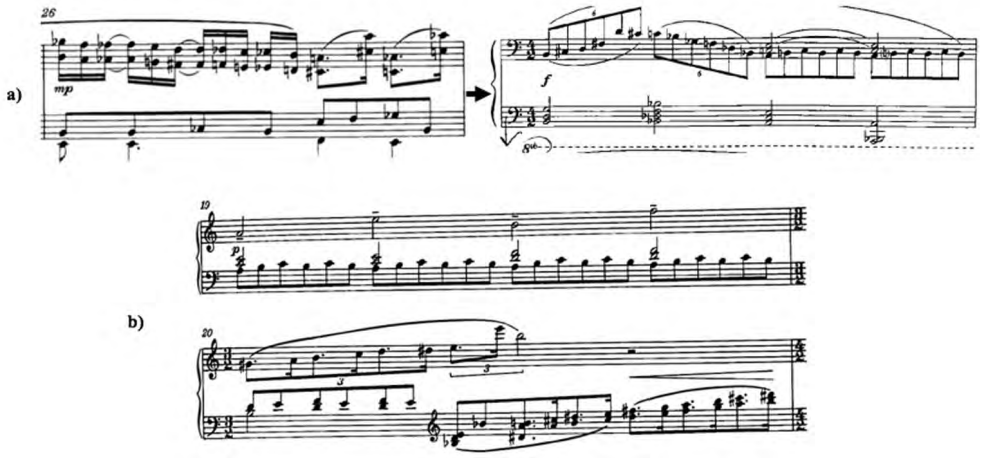


Example 4. A comparative view of the last bar from VL 312 (a) and the incipit from VL 310: the upper note of the final A major chord from the first piece may serve as a bridge to the following G minor chord from the second one, as explained in the body text

suggestive of cyclicality on a theoretical level[27]) offers the performer a natural bridge. This can be enhanced by allowing the upper note to resonate slightly longer than the rest of the chord (through a masterful use of pedalling) and, also, by means of their body language – encouraging the listener to perceive consistency by observing the pianist's hands rising and carefully gliding back to the keyboard as if to 'conduct' the entry into the next piece (Example 4).

VL 311 shows a familiar metrical structure with VL 310 (4/2 instead of 4/4, eighth-note sextuplets instead of semiquaver triplets). This allows the performer to pursue the same strategy as in the transition between VL 309 and VL 312 before, which is to keep analogous metrical proportions by simply switching, in this case, to a *tempo doppio* (Example 5a). Moreover, separating the two works with a small *ritenuto*, possibly followed by a short 'dramatic' pause, can help underline the shift in character for the listener: this prelude, in fact, is characterised by a constant, ever-threatening lead towards a climax (by means of 'wave-like' figures), whilst the previous one maintained a more oneiric atmosphere throughout. This climax is ultimately reached in the very final bars, through its progressive construction above the wave-like sextuplets *ostinato* and the latter's incremental disruptions from bb. 19–20 by relentless dotted

27 Janeliauskas 2010: 159.



Example 5. A comparative view between the last bar of VL 310 and the incipit of VL 311: (a) a smooth cyclical connection can be ensured by simply switching to a *tempo doppio*. The latter work also contains an inner transition between bb. 19–20, (b) leading to a dotted-rhythms section progressively disrupting the initial *ostinato* and relentlessly leading to the final climax

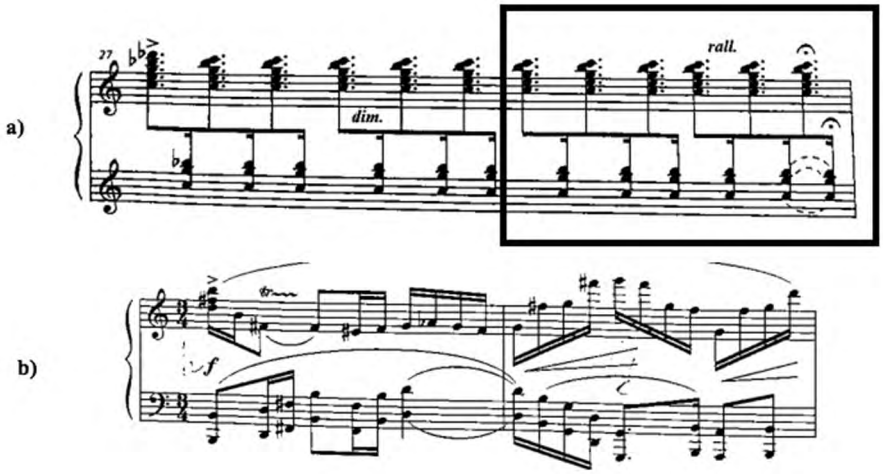
figures, effectively dividing the piece into two halves, the second acting as a bridge to VL 313 (Example 5b).

The transition from VL 311 to VL 313 can be powerfully rendered through gestuality: the performer may dramatically lift their arms after the final thunderous chords of the first piece and drop them after the raging, 'tempestuous' incipit of the second. As for the *tempi* relationship, a progressive *rallentando*, starting from the final two groups of chords, is recommended, leading to a *fermata* roughly equal in length to a full bar from the following prelude, based on the chosen *tempo* according to common practice (Example 6).[28]

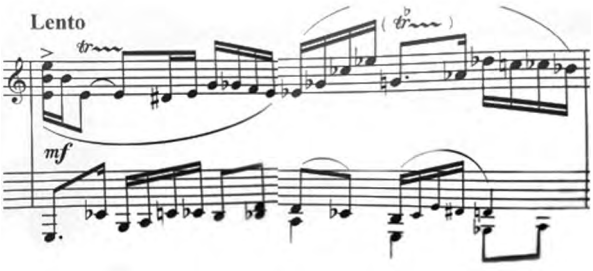
The reprise of VL 309 is facilitated by the mysterious, suspended conclusion of VL 313, which leaves room for further development. Here, the absence of a tonal relationship functions paradoxically as a unifying feature, especially when supported by performative gestures similar to those used in the transition from VL 312 to VL 310 (Example 7). The reiteration can work even more efficiently if presented with a more enigmatic shade, perhaps at a slightly slower *tempo* and rather 'colourless'. A 'dramatic' pause before the final chord may also help signify the conclusion of the cycle.[29]

28 Some valid examples are represented by the recital *Čiurlionis kitaip* (Čiurlionis Differently) by Jurgis Karnavičius available on www.lrt.lt, and the performance of the author of this paper at the international conference *Principles of Music Composition* on 18 November 2020, available on LMTA YouTube channel:
https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000073521/ciurlionis-kitaip. Last accessed: 28 April 2025.
https://www.youtube.com/live/NkIQGaWLCmM?feature=shared. Last accessed: 28 April 2025.

29 Ibid.



Example 6. A comparative view between the last bar of VL 310 (a) and the incipit of VL 313 (b): the final two figures of repeated chords (inside the box) work as the connecting material between the two works in the ways described in the body text



Example 7. Last two bars from VL 313, showing an opening ending

By now, it is clear how the interconnections between the works in 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10' may not be immediately evident through 'thematic unity' alone (e.g., sea-related phenomena, such as waves and free-floating), nor through compositional features indicated in musicological literature. Rather, they require active interpretive choices by the performer – drawing from selected musical elements and expressive gestures – to make these connections legible and emotionally resonant for the listener.

Conclusions

In summary, achieving fluency in a 'cyclical' sense is an original interpretive process undertaken by the performer. It involves combining their ability to interpret the information given in the score with their own artistic intuition and translating both into a convincing and coherent performance. As explored in the previous paragraphs, potential ways of connecting the two pieces within a cycle can rely on emphasising

the existing tonal and metrical relationships, as well as incorporating the pianist's body language and expressive use of pauses.

The table below summarises the various possibilities based on these three criteria, as identified in the analysis of 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10'. It can be observed that metrical relationships are often the strongest and most easily perceived by the listener, for example, in the transition from VL 309 to VL 312. Tonal relationships, on the other hand, often require support from the performer's gestural expression to be fully effective.

Table. **An overview of the transitions from one to another piece of 'Unrecognised Cycle No. 10' based on the three main criteria: tonal relationships, metrical relationships, and performer's input**

	Tonal relationships	Metrical relationships	Performer's input
VL 309 > 312		X	
VL 312 > 310	X		X
VL 310 > 311		X	X
VL 311 > 313			X
VL 312 > 309b	X		X

A similar approach can be applied to constructing analogous relationships between other musical cycles by Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Performers may consider offering audiences a brief introduction on Čiurlionis's concept of cyclical (reflected not only in his artistic output but also in his philosophical worldview) and the thematic threads that link different works.

This strategy may also be helpful when interpreting musical cycles by other composers, with the aim of revealing potential cyclical consistency. Notable examples include the two sets of Etudes Op. 10 and Op. 25 by Frédéric Chopin, the *Novelletten* Op. 21 by Robert Schumann, and the *Préludes* by Claude Debussy, to mention a few.

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Vincenzo De Martino

Vientisumo ir ciklinio nuoseklumo paieškos atliekant Mikalojaus Konstantino Čiurlionio neatpažintą ciklą Nr. 10 „Jūros etiudai“

Santrauka

Straipsnyje iš naujo keliamas klausimas, ar Mikalojaus Konstantino Čiurlionio (1875–1911) fortepijoniniai kūriniai gali būti suvokiami kaip didesnių ciklų dalys; šią problemą kadaise iškėlė Čiurlionio kūrybos tyrinėtojai, tarp jų – Vytautas Landsbergis, Darius Kučinskas ir Rimantas Janeliauskas. Remdamasis pastarojo prielaidomis apie Čiurlionio kūrybos „ciklišką“, pasireiškiantį vadinamaisiais „neatpažįstamais muzikos ciklais“ (šį terminą sukūrė Janeliauskas), straipsnio autorius tyrinėja, kaip pianistas, taikydamas įvairias pasikartojančias priemones, gali siekti ciklinės darnos, kad jie iš tiesų būtų suvokiami kaip ciklai. Siekiant šio tikslo daugiausia dėmesio skiriama vienam konkrečiam kūriniui – neatpažintam ciklui Nr. 10 „Jūros etiudai“. Autorius daro išvadą, kad „ciklišku mo“ užtikrinimas yra originalus atlikėjo darbas, kai derinamas pianisto gebėjimas perskaityti natomis pateiktą informaciją su jo paties meniniu indėliu ir pasiekiamas įtikinamas bendras rezultatas. Tekste pateikiamais muzikiniais pavyzdžiais atskleidžiama, kad galima sujungti du ciklo kūrinius tiek tonaciniais, tiek metriniais ryšiais, taip pat pianisto kūno kalba bei meninėmis pauzėmis. Laikantis panašaus požiūrio galima konstruoti ryšius ne tik tarp kitų Čiurlionio kūrinių, bet ir kitų kompozitorių kūrinių.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, neatpažinti ciklai, neatpažintas ciklas Nr. 10 „Jūros etiudai“, muzikiniai ciklai, ciklišku mas