

A Letter from the Past: Yiddish Songs

General Programme Description



“The songs performed are comprehensible to everyone because they touch upon co-human topics. They are based on contrast as they are full of lyrical elements, healthy sense of humour and dramatism. Culture is a form of belief and a perpetuum mobile for life; it is sacred and impossible to explain. It is the essential criterion enabling us to call ourselves human beings”, pianist Darius Mažintas claims.

“Some musical compositions of the programme are emotive songs about daily life, while some are based on texts of prayers. There are two works by Maurice Ravel arranged for piano and voice. One of them titled Kaddish is a prayer for the dead”, tenor Rafailas Karpis says.

A Letter from the Past: Yiddish Songs performed by Lithuanian tenor Rafailas Karpis and pianist Darius Mažintas is important in Lithuanian cultural contexts from both the musical and the microhistorical perspectives. These Jewish songs arranged for piano and voice by various authors reveal peculiarities of daily life of people who lived in Lithuania before the Second World War as well as their social connections, experiences and individual personal tragedies caused by the war. The songs reflect the then relevancies, feelings of people of the times as well as social problems of the period. The songs in a way send a message that it is not necessary to have your own land in order to retain strong culture. Most authors of the lyrics are closely linked to the history of the then Lithuania and Vilnius and they are active cultural figures of the times; therefore, the audience will have an opportunity to hear rare and multi-layered musical compositions of significant aesthetic and historical value.

According to Lithuanian musicologist and conductor Donatas Katkus, this programme is a very important, yet rare phenomenon witnessing relevancies of our Jewish cultural memory. In addition to the historical aspect, the programme is notable for its artistic value. The present programme is a monument to the European Yiddish language which is being forgotten in Europe. The programme is defined by unique vocal expression in addition to specific poetic texts which determine the Jewish cultural identity. The repertoire selected by the performers is exclusive which is also confirmed by the fact that, although composers themselves (Mordechai Gebirtig, Aleksander Olshanetsky, Chaya Chati, Gabriel Grad and Israel Sherman) are not widely known, the melodic patterns are close to Jewish folklore, and the stylistic peculiarities illustrate European musical priorities well. It is a typical musical panorama of the beginning of the 20th century in Europe. This is where the authors were looking for inspiration as they came up with a sensible and romantic picture of images and emotions where a large majority of Jewish folklore is interpreted, by also retaining the main principles of Romantic spirit.

In 2012, a CD titled YIDDISH SONGS/ A LETTER FROM THE PAST was released. According to musicologist Laimutė Ligeikaitė, this is how **an exemplary and sincere intention to contribute to the revival and dissemination of Jewish music to broader audiences** was demonstrated by Rafailas Karpis and Darius Mažintas.

A Letter from the Past: Yiddish Songs

Performers

Rafailas Karpis, tenor (born on 10.04.1983)



Rafailas Karpis was born in 1983 in Vilnius. He graduated from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (Master's degree in 2007). Mr. Karpis studied at professor Virgilijus Noreika's singing class. In 1999, he became a Grand Prix winner of young singers of the Baltic sea countries competition. In 2003, he began singing in the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre. In 2008, he was awarded with a Hope of Lithuanian Opera prize, and in 2010 he was recognised as the best performer of supporting opera roles. He sings in various opera and musical productions. His opera repertoire consists of roles such as: Officer (Rossini's *The barber of Sevilia*), Trike (Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*), Goro (Puccini's

Madam Baterflai, stage director Anthony Minghella.), Jew (Strauss' *Salome*), The Vain Man and a Snake (Portman's *Little Prince*), Monostatos (Mozart's *The Magic Flute*). Jurodiv, Misail and Noble (Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*), Tobias (Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*), Remendado (Bizet's *Karmen*), Don Basilio (Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*), Gaston (Verdi's *Traviatta*), Roderigo (Verdi's *Otello*), Njegush (Lehar's *The Marry Widow*), Jozef (Strauss' *Viennese Spirit*) Captain, the Crook, Prince Achmet, Alchemist and Cosmetic merchant (Bernstein's *Candide*) et al. He also sang in the production of Leonard Bernstein titled *MASS*, and Arthur Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* with the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra. Being grown up in a Jewish family, he felt a special interest in Jewish music, especially in Yiddish songs, and has gained a wide repertoire of Yiddish songs composed by Lithuanian Jews and other composers. Rafailas Karpis was the main soloist in World premiere Oratorio *Sakura Memories* held in Kaunas National Drama Theatre in 2015. Organisers: Embassy of Japan in Lithuania, National Drama Theatre, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania.

Darius Mažintas, piano (born on 07.03.1982)

Due to his exceptional musical sensitivity and talent as well as appealing forms of expression and unique interpretations, **Darius Mažintas** has already gained recognition by Lithuanian audiences. As it was claimed by well-known Lithuanian conductor maestro Saulius Sondeckis in 2010, "the pianist is worth international attention, too". The graduate of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (the piano class of Professor Veronika Vitaitė) is a winner of numerous national and international music competitions. World's famous halls where his performances have taken place encompass *Concertgebouw* (Netherlands), *Moscow State Philharmonic Society* et al. The list of music festivals where the pianist has participated includes *Aspen Music Festival*, *Westchester Piano Festival* (USA), *Sommerakademie* (Germany), and *Holland Music Sessions* (Netherlands).



In the latter festival, Darius Mažintas and cellist Glebas Pyšniakas were announced winners of the *New Masters on Tour* program enabling them to perform in Europe's most famous halls, and a successful concert tour was consequently organized. Several albums were recorded by the pianist among which a solo album (2011) including pieces by Bach, Beethoven and Scriabin is present. While working as the Art Director at *Vaidilos Klasika* classical music project, Mr. Mažintas contributed a lot to classical music dissemination and talent discovery in Lithuanian cultural contexts. Projects titled *Musical Heritage Representation in Vilnius City Schools* and *Letters from the Past* were implemented by him. Other activities encompass a number of charity events, too. The pianist was the founder of the *Culture Live* public institution, which he led until 2013. In 2013-2014, he served as a Deputy Minister for Culture of the Republic of Lithuania. A sequence of lectures and concerts targeted at schoolchildren and teachers were held by the pianist in cooperation with famous musicologist and main expert at the Nobel Prize concert ceremony Professor Michail Kazinik at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania and at Vilnius City Municipality. Darius Mažintas was working on the international level, thus organizing notably successful concerts in world's grand halls such as *Berlin Philharmonic Society*, *New York Carnegie Hall*, and *London Wigmore Hall* later reviewed by various music critics and popular media outlets such as *New York Concert Review*, *Klassik in Berlin*, and *The Times*. The biography of the pianist includes over 150 successful concerts.