

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

Twenty-fourth season

A black and white collage featuring a violin, a cello, and a piece of sheet music with musical notation. The instruments are rendered in a stylized, layered manner, overlapping each other and the text. The background consists of various geometric shapes and textures, creating a complex, abstract composition.

Encore Ltd.

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
UIHLEIN HALL

Thursday, June 30, 8:00 P.M.

Latvian Song Festival

in cooperation with New York Latvian Concert Choir and

MILWAUKEE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



present

The first performance in Milwaukee
of Alfrēds Kalniņš' romantic opera

B A Ņ U T A

(in concert form)

libretto by Arturs Krūmiņš

first produced at Rīga, May 29, 1920

Time of the action: The legendary past of Latvia-Lithuania
C.A. the 14th Century

Acts I and II: the fortress of King Valgudis

INTERMISSION

Acts III and IV: Romuva — the countryside in Lithuania

CAST

BAŅUTA, Soprano..... Maralin Niska
DAUMANTS, *Bass-baritone*..... Algis Grigas
VALGUDIS, *Bass-baritone*..... Algis Grigas
VIŽUTS, *Tenor*..... Michael Fiacco
MAIGA, *Mezzo-soprano*..... Ilga Zenta Paups
ZVANTEVAITIS, *Baritone*..... Kārlis Grīnbergs
WIZARD, *Tenor*..... Pēteris Lielzuika
OLD MAN, *Tenor*..... Pēteris Lielzuika
KRĪVS, *Bass-baritone*..... Visvaldis Gedulis
KRĪVU KRĪVS, *Bass*..... Algis Grigas

New York Latvian Concert Choir

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

Andrejs Jansons, *conductor*

Accompanist..... Ingrīda Šturms-Coble
Publicity..... Edvīns Stots, Uldis Grava
Artwork..... Egils Hermanovskis, Juris Upmanis
Photography..... Aina Balgalve
English Translation of libretto..... Biruta Sūrmane
Consultants in Musicology..... Longīns Apkalns, Arnolds Klotiņš
Consultant in Linguistics..... Agate Tērauda

This performance is made possible with grants from the Latvian Foundation, New York Latvian Concert Choir and the National Endowment of Arts

Synopsis of BAŅUTA

Act I. King Valgudis and his court welcome home his son Daumants, who returns from a long voyage, leading home a bride, Baņuta. She is expected to produce heirs and ensure the continuation of Valgudis' clan. Banuta relates how Daumants saved her life when crusaders invaded her ancestral castle. The wedding ceremonies are disturbed by a raven croaking ominously. The raven reminds Daumants of the night in the forest when he ravished fair Yargala, who had refused his suit for marriage. Sending Baņuta off to bed and dismissing the guests, Daumants remains alone, reminiscing and brooding. Yargala's brother, Vižuts, secretly enters the castle, seeking to revenge his sister's honor. They duel, Daumants is slain.

Act II. Baņuta and Daumant's sister Maiga mourn at Daumants' casket. People gather for a last farewell. Zvantevaitis blames the Wizard for Daumants' death and condemns him to perish on the pyre. The Wizard, pretending to see Daumants' ghost and supported by Valgudis' accusations of Baņuta, puts the blame on her and asks for her sacrifice on the funeral pyre. As the funeral procession moves forward, Daumants' shield crashes to the ground blocking Baņuta's path—a sign that he doesn't blame her for his death. Valgudis extracts a solemn oath from Baņuta that she will not fall in love until

Daumants' death has been avenged.

Act III. Midsummernight Eve. Everyone is merry but Baņuta, who is further saddened by Maiga's confession that she is in love. Among the crowd Banuta notices a youth who places a red rose on the sacrificial altar. According to tradition, the girl who picks up the rose will be his. Baņuta takes the rose, bitterly lamenting the fact that the oath forbids her to love. Upon hearing Baņuta's lament, a priest releases her from the oath until midnight, when trumpets will sound thrice. The festivities continue. The High Priest summons everyone to perform a sacrifice to the Thundergod. Vižuts recognizes his rose in Baņuta's hair and declares his passionate love for her.

Act IV. Gnomes and faeries sing and dances in a moonlit clearing in the holy grove at Romove. Baņuta and Vižuts arrive and continue with their mutual confession of deepest love. Soon trumpets sound the signal for midnight. Baņuta reveals her secret to Vizuts, who realizes her identity and confesses he killed Daumants. They agree that to be united in death is preferable to separation in life and stab their breasts with Baņuta's dagger. The others arriving on the scene to welcome the new day find the dead lovers and ask the gods to grant them eternal peace.

The libretto of *Baņuta*, by Arturs Krūmiņš, is not based on history, but certain names and events suggest thirteenth century Lithuania, under the rule of King Mindaugas, when there lived an adventuresome warrior, Daumants. Like so many nineteenth century poets, Krūmiņš was fascinated by Medieval myths and legends and, without much regard for historical facts, juggled events around to create a romantic story, complete with mysticism, patriotism, sentiment and revenge in defense of honor.

The premiere of *Baņuta* took place in 1920, when Latvia had barely won its struggle for independence. The fact that Kalniņš had chosen a story that takes place in Lithuania, a neighboring country, for a nationalistic Latvian opera annoyed many, and in subsequent productions censors eliminated references to Lithuania from the text and replaced them with "fatherland" or "homeland". Further changes were made in 1940, at the start of the Soviet occupation, when both composer and librettist were asked to write a new finale, to reflect the ideology of the "new order". For this Milwaukee performance the original text and music have been restored.

Meet the Artists



Alfrēds Kalniņš (1879-1951), composer, conductor, organ virtuoso and pianist, is one of the most original personalities in Latvian music history. His works number some 500 opuses and include two operas, two ballets, numerous cantatas, over 300 art songs, duets, works for a *capella*

chorus, chamber music, as well as works for piano and organ. One of the chief protagonists of romantic nationalism in Latvian music, Kalniņš achieved a most sophisticated expressive style.

Despite his success as an artist, Kalniņš did not find favor with the hierarchy of the musical establishment in Latvia, and emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1927, hoping to establish himself in New York. For six years he worked as organist and choir director at the Christ Lutheran Church on 153rd Street, gave recitals in Boston, Philadelphia and Washington and composed prodigiously, but eventually came to realize that he could not adapt himself to the very competitive atmosphere of the American musical scene. In 1933 he accepted the invitation of the Latvian government to return to Rīga, where he was appointed organist at the Dom Cathedral, the most coveted organist position in Latvia.



Maralin Niska is an artist whose incisive imagination, coupled with impeccable musicianship, have given her deep insight into an astonishing diversity of over fifty operatic roles. She received national recognition when she made her debut with the opening performance of the Metropolitan Opera National Company in 1965. She was engaged in 1967 by the New York City Opera. This was followed in 1972 by her debut with the Metropolitan Opera, where she has subsequently sung the roles of Violetta, Tosca, Salome, Nedda and Donna Elvira, including three broadcasts and the first live telecast. Born and trained in America,

Maralin Niska has enjoyed a unique position as leading soprano of both the Metropolitan Opera and the New York City Opera. The role of Baņuta is her first in Latvian, which she sang in New York in June of 1982.



Algis Grigas was born in Kaunas, Lithuania. He began his vocal training in Chicago at the age of sixteen with Mdm. Alodija Diciute. A year later he was granted a five year scholarship with the late Mario Lanza's teacher, Maurice Sciapio at De Paul University. He attended the

Chicago Conservatory of Music and Chicago Musical College at Roosevelt University and continued his vocal training with Dimitri Onofrei. Algis Grigas made his operatic debut as Germont in *La Traviata*. He has appeared with the Lithuanian Opera Company, the Lyric Opera of Chicago and in numerous concerts in the U.S. and Canada. In 1968 he appeared in the leading baritone role in the world premiere of Darius Lapinskas' opera *Maras*. In 1973 he founded the Chicago Opera Co. and produced Puccini's *La Boheme*. Most recently he sang in Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Erdvillis in Ponchielli's *I Lituani*. Sang in Kalniņš' *Baņuta* in New York.



Michael Fiacco — Tenor. Master of Fine Arts in vocal performance, State University of New York, Buffalo. Presently studying at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia. Has sung with the Santa Fe Opera, Buffalo Philharmonic, Western New York Opera Theatre, and

the Opera Sacra of Buffalo. His repertoire includes Midas in Strauss' *Die Liebe der Danae*, Apollo in Strauss' *Daphne*, Gastone in Verdi's *La Traviata*, Junger Diener in Strauss' *Elektra*, Lenski in Tchaikovsky's *Eugen Onegin*, Hoffman in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*, Tamino in Mozart's *Magic Flute*, and Vizuts in Alfrēds Kalniņš' *Baņuta*.



Kārlis Grīnbergs studied voice at the Boston Conservatory of Music. He has given recitals throughout the United States and premiered many new works. He appeared as soloist at the Latvian Song Festivals in Boston and Visby, Sweden and has been a frequent guest artist with the New York Latvian Concert Choir. He has received an album of songs by Latvian composers.



Visvaldis Gedulis received his musical training at the Landesmusikschule Schleswig-Holstein in Lubeck, Germany, and at the New York College of Music and the Juilliard School of Music in New York. His debut concert took place at Carnegie Recital Hall in 1962 and at the same time he made his operatic debut as Count Almaviva in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* with the Opera Theatre of Long Island. He appeared as soloist in the first performance of Bruno Skulte's oratorio *Daugava* and has recorded two albums of Latvian Art Songs and Folk Songs.



Ilga Zenta Paups graduated from the Hartt College of Music in 1976, where she studied voice with Sofia Steffan and Rae Smith. At Hartt she has performed in many opera department productions and held leading roles with the school's summer repertory theater. A member of the Connecticut Opera since 1975, she sings regularly with the chorus and has performed several comprimario roles. She has appeared as soloist with the Hartford Symphony in Bach's *St. Matthew* Passion. Ms. Paups is a soloist at Center Church of Hartford, St.

Thomas Church of West Hartford and is a member of the South Church Choral Society of New Britain. She has sung many solo recitals and is a frequent soloist with the New York Latvian Concert Choir.



Pēteris Lielzuika is one of four brothers in a family of musicians. He began his vocal training after the Second World War in Ansbach, Germany and continued them with Pauls Sakss in Stuttgart. In New York he studied at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and began his singing career as soloist with the New York Mens' Choir, under the direction of Bruno Skulte. Engagements have taken him to London, Cologne, Cleveland, Seattle and Los Angeles. Mr. Lielzuika presently resides in Kalamazoo, Michigan, home base for his busy concert schedule.



Andrejs Jansons, music director and principal conductor of the New York Latvian Concert Choir, received his B.S. degree from the Juilliard School of Music and an M.M. in conducting from the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied conducting with Anton Coppola. He has conducted the Manhattan Chorus and Orchestra, appeared as guest conductor at music festivals in Boston, San Francisco, Montreal, Visby-Sweden, conducted musicals and ballet performances in Boston, Los Angeles, New York and Toronto, as well as recordings for the Monitor and Kaibala labels. He is responsible for introducing numerous new works to New York audiences at symphonic concerts at New York's Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. Conducted American premiere of Alfreds Kalniņš' *Baņuta*.

The New York Latvian Concert Choir was founded in 1975 with the purpose of providing musical training in the Latvian choral traditions through the presentation of classical and contemporary works by Latvian composers. Based in Yonkers, New York, the Choir performs regularly in New York's

major concert halls and tours the U.S., Canada and Europe with concerts of Latvian choral and symphonic works. Since 1978 it has been a recipient of New York State Council on the Arts, Latvian Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts grants.

Patrons and benefactors of the June 30th performance of *Baņuta* (As of June 10, 1983)

- Edīte and Pauls Zeltiņš
- Aija Deme
- Minneapolis and St. Paul Latvian Lutheran Church Choir
- Dagmāra Poilova
- Rolfs Ekmanis
- Lalita and Valdis Muižnieks
- Ada and Kārlis Salna
- Aivars and Irma Pelds
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- Jānis Jakāns
- Raimonds Kerno
- Modris Galenieks
- Dr. Irēne Zeltiņš
- Arturs Krīgers
- Dr. Viktorija Mickāne
- Anna Ūdris

BANUTA

In Latvian operatic literature *Banuta* is considered a classic. It is the first and, so far, the most successful Latvian opera, having remained in the standard repertoire of the State Opera Theatre of Riga to this day.

Whereas Italy and France can boast of an operatic tradition of almost 400 years, Latvia's musical heritage is based primarily on an unwritten folk song tradition dating back some 2000 years, which did not join the mainstream of West European musical trends until the second half of the 19th Century. It is no wonder then, that in 1920, when the young nation's struggle for independence had barely been won, Latvia was not yet ready for an original opera and, having expected something along the lines of the popular "verissimo" style, received *Banuta* with reservations.

The new opera surprised many. To begin with, Kalniņš was known as an organist and a composer of lyric songs, who had not shown any leanings toward the dramatic stage. Therefore, *Banuta* is all the more remarkable for its dramatic content, flair and thorough understanding of the compositional techniques of opera.

Although Kalniņš uses folk material, particularly to underline the pagan Midsummernight festivities in the 3rd and 4th acts, *Banuta* is not a folk opera in the sense of *Der Freischütz* or *The Bartered Bride*. If anything, it is much closer to a romantic music drama. Kalniņš does not follow the leitmotif system to the extent that Wagner does, but relies, instead, on his musical ingenuity to connect segments of the drama through vivid symphonic episodes and several motifs, which, in various thematic transformations, appear throughout the opera. Recitatives do not follow the Italian "secco" formula, nor do they reflect Wagner's technique of giving the voices a subsidiary role to that of the orchestra. Instead, the vocal lines have a lyrical declamatory character. There are few self contained arias, as the music seems to flow in a continuous, through-composed narrative.

One of the most unusual characteristics of *Banuta* is the composer's extensive use of the chorus throughout the opera. As in the Greek dramas, its purpose is to comment on the action and to give advice to the protagonists.

Banuta has survived several governments in Latvia and, as in Verdi's *Un Ballo in maschera*, censors have made changes in the text to accommodate the wishes of the respective regimes. For the 1937 production Kalniņš re-wrote some of the music and re-orchestrated the first two acts. Much of this work was done while he lived in New York between 1927 and 1933. In 1940, at the start of the Soviet occupation, he was asked to write a new finale, which would conform to Soviet ideology. This version, with a happy ending, in the Baroque tradition using the *deus ex machina* technique, was used until 1979. Subsequent productions at Riga have reverted back to the original tragic ending, but most of the changes instituted by the censors, throughout the libretto, still remain. For this concert performance by the New York Latvian Concert Choir and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra the original text from the composer's manuscript will be used.

The American Premiere of *Banuta* took place at Carnegie Hall, New York, on June 5th, 1982, with Andrejs Jansons conducting the New York Latvian Concert Choir and the Bronx Arts Orchestra.

"*Banuta communicates and captures the imagination... the many choral passages were superbly rendered.*"

OPERA DIGEST, New York

"*Operatic success by Latvian Choir... in a sold out Carnegie Hall the 130 voice choir with the Bronx Arts Orchestra brought off its mission with distinction.*"

THE RECORD, New Jersey

"*Banuta is a large scale opera, beautifully constructed... the overall success of this performance was due to the precise, sensitive conducting of Andrejs Jansons.*"

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