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"LETTERS FROM AMERICA": SONGS OF LITHUANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA

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Abstract: In the nineteenth century, most Lithuanian immigrants in America were peasants who had left homeland in search for a better life in Pennsylvanian coal mines or Chicago stockyards. Immigrant songs described the pain of parting from the loved ones, the impressions of the strange new land, and reminiscences of the homeland. Some songs were printed on postcards so that even an illiterate person could sign the card and send it home. The first immigrants, having grown up in green villages of Lithuania, used to return to their homeland in their thoughts, and, of course, through their songs.

The story of Lithuanian immigrants is not exceptional; it can be regarded as an example of the cultural situation and development of immigrant communities more generally. This article deals with the folk songs of the first-generation immigrants, recorded by Lithuanian folklorist Jonas Balys. In 1944, Balys left for Germany with his family, and in 1948 he moved on to the USA. Working at Indiana University in Bloomington, Balys was encouraged to visit Lithuanian immigrants and record their folklore. The expeditions (1949–1951) proved successful, and he recorded many songs on magnetic tapes, as well as folktales and other folklore genres. From this material Balys prepared a two-volume publication of songs (published in the USA in 1958 and 1977) which contained folk songs representing the traditional rural way of life, as well as some immigrant songs. This article focuses on immigrant songs, the longing for the homeland and other emotions that they convey.

Keywords: Jonas Balys, Lithuanian immigrants in the USA, Lithuanian folklore, immigrant songs, nostalgia

INTRODUCTION

Individual Lithuanians had travelled to America since the seventeenth century,[1] but massive emigration started in the 1860s and lasted up to World War I. The primary reasons were the abolishment of serfdom, the reprisals for the failed uprising against the tsarist government in 1863–1864, the famine of 1867–1868, as well as a desire to avoid the forced recruitment into the tsarist army. It is estimated that in the nineteenth century 50,000 to 100,000 Lithuanians came to the New World (Kučas 1975: 22–27). At that time in America there was a great demand for labor in coal mines, stockyards, factories, sewing mills, and on the railroads. A more exact count of Lithuanian immigrants was made after 1899, when they were registered as Lithuanians, and not as Russians or Poles. From 1899 until 1915 more than 252,000 Lithuanians came to the USA (Kondratas 2009: 22).

Most of the Lithuanian immigrants were peasants, without education, who left homeland "in search of a better life" in Pennsylvania's coal mines or Chicago's stockyards. One of the first and largest communities was in the town of Shenandoah in Pennsylvania, where the first Lithuanian coal miners settled in 1869. According to Antanas Kučas, Shenandoah was called the capital of Lithuanians in America. This town was the only American town where Lithuanian immigrants played an important role in the town's history, forming about a third of the population and even taking part in its government (Kučas 1971: 38–40). Here Lithuanians built two churches, published newspapers and books, established Lithuanian schools, had a brass band, a choir, clubs, and even four cemeteries. A large number of Lithuanians also settled in other mining towns in Pennsylvania. At first, Lithuanian immigrants tried to stay close to Polish immigrants, establishing joint Catholic parishes and fraternities. As the Lithuanian national consciousness grew stronger with the desire that religious rituals, prayers and hymns be in Lithuanian, conflicts between Lithuanians and Poles also increased. For instance, the first church of St. Casimir of Shenandoah, built in 1874 from donations of Lithuanians, was registered as a Polish Catholic church because of an oversight. The Lithuanians who rebelled against the Polish priest, whom the bishop had assigned, were punished and thus lost their church. At that time, they began establishing a separate Lithuanian parish of St. George (Būtėnas & Kezys 1977: 14–16). When more Lithuanian priests arrived, they brought with them patriotic ideas that were published in Lithuania's underground newspapers *Aušra* (Dawn) and *Varpas* (The Bell) and began establishing their own parishes in other Lithuanian immigrant settlements. According to folklorist Elena Bradūnaitė-Aglinskienė (2020), religious affiliation was a strong component of identity for the immigrants, and, therefore,

the parish priests were very influential in educating and encouraging national consciousness among the parishioners. Lithuanian communities were formed wherever they built their own churches and schools.

Scholars from Lithuania and the diaspora have researched and written about the communities and lifestyles of the first wave of Lithuanian immigrants to the USA (Sužiedėlis 1953; Ambrose 1967; Michelsonas 1961; Kučas 1971; Fainhauz 1977; Subačius 2006; Škiudaitė 2006; Kondratas 2009). Researchers have mostly focused on issues of immigration and the preservation of Lithuanian identity. According to them, "concern about identity markers was namely the actual experience of migration, which fostered a self-awareness of ethnic uniqueness and thus accelerated the formation of a national identity" (Grickevičius & Strumickienė & Dapkutė 2015: 18). Anthropologist Vytis Čiubrinskas (2005, 2011) and historian Alfonsas Eidintas (2021) have devoted much attention to this topic in their scholarly works. Musical culture as an expression of identity has been discussed by musicologists Juozas Žilevičius (1940, 1956), Danutė Petrauskaitė (2015), as well as Rūta Žarskienė (2020), who wrote specifically about the significance of brass bands in the formation of national consciousness.

Folklorists Jonas Balys, Juozas Būga, who immigrated after World War II, and Elena Bradūnaitė-Aglinskienė (née Elena Bradūnas)[2] made a significant contribution to the research on the first wave of immigrants. They managed to engage with the most songful and talkative members of the Lithuanian communities and wrote down songs, folktales, riddles, and other folklore genres that were preserved in their memories. The folklore they collected, as well as expedition field notes and life stories of their informants were first published in the diaspora (Balys 1958, 1977, 1989; Būtėnas & Kezys 1977). Later, once Lithuania regained independence, this material was also published in Lithuania: E. Bradūnaitė's collection of songs was published in *Tautosakos Darbai* (Folklore Studies) (Aleksynas & Ramoškaitė 1994), and the expedition field notes of J. Balys and E. Bradūnaitė were presented in the book *Aš išdainavau visas daineles* (I have sung all the songs, Vol. III) (Bradūnaitė-Aglinskienė 1997). Recently, the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore published a collection titled *Lietuvių dainos Amerikoje, įrašytos Jono Balio (1949–1951) / Lithuanian Folksongs in America, recorded by Jonas Balys 1949–1951*, edited by Austė Nakienė and Rūta Žarskienė (2019). The Folklore Archives of this institute house copies of the manuscripts of this material that was sent from the USA.

Although the material of the expeditions is easily accessible,[3] it has not yet been studied in detail. Thus, the authors of this article, drawing on historiographical, analytical and comparative methods, decided to focus on immigrant songs, which differ significantly from the older folksongs in their personalized lyrics and emotional charge. According to Philip V. Bohlman (1988: 29),

traditional music and cultural identity are two essentially different concerns that the ethnomusicologist couples as a normative research procedure. We cannot avoid this comparison when researching themes of immigration; however, we will turn our attention in a different direction – we look at immigrant songs not so much as an expression of Lithuanian identity but as a means of maintaining an emotional connection with the homeland.

WORKS OF THE FAMOUS LITHUANIAN FOLKLORIST DR. JONAS BALYS

Jonas Balys (1909–2011) spent his childhood in the village of Krasnava, not far from Kupiškis. He started collecting folklore while studying at the Teachers' College in Panevėžys. From 1928 to 1933 Balys studied at the universities of Kaunas, Graz, and Vienna – from the latter he received his PhD degree – and completed an internship in Helsinki. In 1933 he returned to Kaunas, became a lecturer at Vytautas Magnus University, and in 1935 he started to head the newly established Lithuanian Folklore Archives. The young, energetic scholar initiated an extensive gathering of folklore manuscripts and sound recordings and started publishing the periodical *Tautosakos darbai* (Folklore Studies). In 1939 the Archives became a part of the Institute of Lithuanian Studies and was moved to Vilnius. During the years of World War II, Balys resided and continued his scholarly work in Vilnius. In 1944, as the Soviet army was approaching Lithuania, Balys and his family left for Germany. He remembers that, being a war refugee, he was careful to safeguard a suitcase with copies of archival materials that he planned to use for his studies.

> *With bombs dropping from airplanes, I would drag my sleepy children and that suitcase with folklore manuscripts into the bomb shelter. During the awful November 27 bombing, British airplanes destroyed the entire city center of the beautiful, old Freiburg. A flammable phosphorus bomb came through the roof and fell into the attic that we had rented from a German lady, in exchange for a big slab of smoked bacon we brought from Lithuania. … And so, we were lucky to survive in the basement of that little house, and that those constantly toted manuscripts were not destroyed by bombs and fire. I consider that to be my greatest success. All those theoretical musings in articles and books, written later, are only secondary in importance. There would not have been any of them had I not brought those selected materials with me. Theories come and go, but authentic materials remain.* (LTRF k 2212)[4]

During 1944–1945 Balys worked as an assistant at the German Folk Song Archive in Freiburg. From 1946–1947 he taught at the Baltic University in Hamburg. In 1948, together with his family, he came to the USA, having been invited by Professor Stith Thompson to work at Indiana University in Bloomington. Thompson encouraged his young colleague to collect material from the first Lithuanian immigrants in America, and Balys decided to visit their settlements and record folklore they still remembered. These expeditions proved successful: he recorded about 1,200 items, mostly songs, also folktales, instrumental music and other folklore genres on magnetic tapes.

> *Having borrowed a magnetic tape recorder (one of the early models, made by Brush Developing Company, and quite heavy) from the university, and with some financial support, I purchased the necessary tapes and set out during the summer months of 1949 and 1950. I travelled by train and bus because I did not have my own car.* (Balys 1977: VI)

> *My biggest discovery was the older generation of the earlier wave of Lithuanian immigrants. … All those older men and women, whom I discovered as representatives of those earlier times, are now gone. They were the last Lithuanian Mohicans, who crossed the ocean but never forgot the spirit of their native culture.* (LTRF k 2212)[5]

Figure 1. *On a boat with a group of Lithuanians and Latvians, approaching America's shore near New York. Balys' family is on the left. Photographed in 1948. JBl ft 52.*

He interviewed 118 people, the majority of whom were born in the nineteenth century (the oldest woman in 1866), and who had emigrated at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The collection was smaller than the one left in Vilnius, but equally varied, reflecting all regions of Lithuania and different styles of singing. It is important to note that this was the first Lithuanian collection of sound recordings made on the newly invented magnetic tape recorder.[6]

In 1955, a good representation of Lithuanian folklore – recordings of 20 songs – appeared on a vinyl record *Lithuanian Folk Songs in the United States,* prepared by Jonas Balys. In the booklet the author wrote that the music of Lithuanian folksongs shows a considerable difference in melodic structure from neighboring peoples, namely Slavs and Germans. Lithuanian immigrants preserved the traditional songs of their former homeland surprisingly well. Among the Dzūkai, the people from the southern part of the country, the old songs were sung with one voice. Among the representatives of other regions, the singing in thirds for two voices (in a manner of a more recent origin) was also popular. The old-fashioned singing was still practiced at banquets and picnics (Balys 1955: 2).

In 1956 Balys started working at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and at the same time concerned himself with the publication of Lithuanian folk songs. Leonardas Sauka, a researcher of Balys's biography and works, noted that from his collections J. Balys prepared a two-volume publication *Lietuvių dainos Amerikoje / Lithuanian Folksongs in America*.

> *The first volume with the subtitle* – Pasakojamosios dainos ir baladės / Narrative Songs and Ballads – *appeared in 1958 and opened a window onto a still living tradition in America. That volume contained 472 song texts, the majority of which he had transcribed in 1952–1954. At the end of the book were 222 melodies, transcribed by composer Vladas Jakubėnas. …. The second volume of* Lietuvių dainos Amerikoje / Lithuanian Folksongs in America*, subtitled* Lyrinės meilės, papročių, darbo, švenčių ir pramogų dainos / Lyric Songs of Love, Customs, Work, Feasts and Entertainments*, appeared in 1977. It included 702 texts, most of them recorded by J. Balys, but 257 songs were recorded by another collector, J. Būga. … These two volumes are considered a great scholarly accomplishment.* (Sauka 2016: 234)

These publications as well as the multivolume series *Lietuvių tautosakos lobynas / A Treasury of Lithuanian Folklore* helped the Lithuanians living in America not to forget their folklore and provided necessary data for researchers. In Lithuania, however, Balys's name was never mentioned, and his works never cited. The first reason was because Balys was an emigrant who had escaped from the

Soviet occupation. Secondly, with his patriotic sentiments, he was an active political figure in the diaspora, an active member of the VLIK (Vyriausiasis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas 'The Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania') and tried to make sure that the US government would not recognize the supposedly "voluntary" incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR.

His efforts were recognized after 1990, once Lithuania had regained independence. In 1994 he was awarded the National Jonas Basanavičius Prize for his scholarly work in Lithuania and in the USA, and for encouraging the maintenance of Lithuanian ethnic traditions. The laureate designated the prize money to be used for the publication of his works. In 1998–2004 the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore published five volumes of Balys's works, edited by Rita Repšienė. In 1999 Balys was honored with the Presidential Award of the 4th Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas.

In 2009 the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore commemorated Balys's 100th birthday. Interest in his published works as well as his archival materials increased. In 2010, in cooperation with the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the Institute received digitized copies of Balys's sound recordings made in 1949–1951. And in 2013, with the help of Mirga and Ramūnas Girnius, who live in Boston, a truck arrived in Vilnius, loaded with Balys's personal items and archival materials. The materials had been deposited at ALKA (Amerikos lietuvių kultūros archyvas / Archive of Lithuanian Culture in America) located in Putnam, Connecticut, and included cassette copies of the recordings made in 1949–1951 as well as much information about the folklorist, ethnologist, and politically and culturally active member of the Lithuanian refugee community. In the same year, the Institute of Lithuanian Folklore and Literature organized a presentation of "Dr. Jonas Balys's Folklore Room" (as the exposition was called in Putnam's ALKA). At that event, the coordinator of the Archives transfer stated: "Even though Jonas Balys never returned to Lithuania after it regained independence, his works did, and they always were, are, and will be of great importance to the development of Lithuanian folklore and ethnology studies" (Žarskienė 2013: 320).

Balys's sound recordings (1949–1951) are of special interest to folklorists.[7] There is a large collection of songs representing so-called old genres: songs of youth, ballads, love songs, family songs, wedding songs, work songs, calendar songs, and others that tell of the traditional rural way of life. According to Rima Visackienė, who worked with the recordings, "while listening, one cannot cease to be amazed that, after so many years of living far away from the homeland and being surrounded by the American world, a person could retain in his memory such treasures without much change or damage to them. After all, these recordings were made almost half a century after the immigrants had

left Lithuania. Most likely the songs were a great source of support, comfort, and constant renewal of ties with brothers, sisters, and relatives left behind in Lithuania, a breath of fresh air from the homeland" (Visackienė 2011: 231).

Figure 2. *Jonas Balys with singers Ona Dakanienė, Sofija Adomaitienė, and Antanina Nenienė. Gary, Indiana, 1949 (Balys 1955: 3).*

IMMIGRANT SONGS: IMPRESSIONS OF THE LONG JOURNEY AND HOPES FOR A BETTER LIFE

Jonas Balys, being a representative of folkloristic ideals of his times, recorded just a few songs about immigration[8] since he was mostly interested in songs of more traditional genres and the entire repertoires of songs that his informants remembered. He published eight immigrant songs in the first volume of his compilation, *Lietuvių dainos Amerikoje / Lithuanian Folksongs in America*, and two songs of this genre in the book *Suvalkiečių liaudies kūryba Amerikoje: antologija* (Anthology of Sudovian Folklore in America) (Balys 1989, No. 29–30). Since he preferred traditional old songs, Balys believed that these songs composed from authored poetry were less worthy than the traditional songs:

> *There aren't that many immigrant songs; most of them are created by people who read books and knew how to write. For that reason, those songs are not that interesting for their poetic form, but they provide information on how the immigrants lived and what they felt a hundred years ago.* (Balys 1989: 139)

The material collected by Jonas Balys is special in that it is written down from "word of mouth", from the first wave of emigrants, from conversations and communications with them, and from their biographies written down in a fieldwork notebook. Thus, it allows us to link the songs and the lives of the people who sang them, to compare the impressions and experiences mentioned in the verses of the songs and in the immigrants' life stories. From the point of view of today's researchers, immigrants' songs are charming in their simplicity and sincerity, and they provide valuable insights into the feelings of rural people in a foreign land at that time.

The Catalogue of Lithuanian Folk Songs identifies almost 200 types of immigrant songs. These songs are divided into three thematic groups: the first group of songs is dedicated to parting with parents and relatives, the journey to a foreign country; the second group speaks about life after emigration, the work, the hardships, the longing for relatives and the homeland, the longing to return or at least to send a letter to the missed loved ones; and the third group of songs urges people not to forget their family and their homeland, not to forsake the mother tongue, and not to lose one's ethnic identity.

The decision to leave for a distant land, and the determination to cross the Atlantic, entailed crossing a threshold akin to that of leaving for war. When emigrating, everyone knew that a connection to their family and loved ones would be lost for a long time, and that they could not hope for advice or help. Parting was followed by the knowledge that they might never see each other again. In saying farewell, there were many mixed emotions: people were nervous, they cried, begged for their parent's blessing, prayed for God's help:

Užaugau kaimely,	I grew up on a farm
Pas savo tėvelį,	Under my father's arm,
Išėjau vandravot,	And left my happy home
Sau laimės parjieškot.	For my fortune to roam.
Kelionei rengdamas,	When I began to pack,
Sunkiai dūsaudamas,	My future seemed so black,
Parpuoliau an kelių,	My poor soul was at a loss,
Bučiavau kryželį.	I knelt and kissed the cross.

Iš namų eidamas,	And as we walked outside,
Gailingai verkdamas,	My parents and I cried;
Visus sveikydamas,	Then, drying our wet eyes,
Sudie sakydamas.	We said many good-byes.
Kaip ėjau pro vartus,	While passing through the gate,
Atsigrįžau tris kartus,	I felt the hand of fate;
Kaip širdį skaudėjo,	The love of native shore,
Tėvynės gailėjo.	My heart and bosom tore…[9]
(Balys 1958, No. 349)	

The song "Užaugau kaimely" (I grew up on a farm) had many verses and was written by village poet Jonas Mykolas Burkus (1839–1919; Noriai village, Pasvalys district); it became very popular both in the USA and in Lithuania. Composer Antanas Vanagaitis (born in 1890 in Šakiai district, died in 1949 in the State of Missouri)[10] used both the words and the melody in his arrangement of the song (Petrauskaitė 2015: 55). From this song we learn that the journey by boat across the Atlantic took about twelve days, and those who were travelling across the seemingly immense ocean were overtaken by great fear. Travelers feared that they might perish, and their death and place of burial would remain unknown; no one would pray for them. When the boat would reach port, the fear would be replaced by great joy:

Po dienų dvylikos	Then, after twelve days more,
Krašte Amerikos	We saw the New World's shore
"Te Deum laudamus"	"Te Deum" we began,
Užgiedam džiaugdamos.	And sang oft and again.
Naujurke sustojom,	We landed in New York,
Po miestą vaikščiojom,	All set to go to work,
Kur eit nežinojom,	At a loss how to begin,
Giminių jieškojom.	We sought help from our kin.
(Balys 1958, No. 349)	

People would travel to foreign countries in search of a "better life", and the same traditional formula as in folktales can be encountered in immigrant songs. It was imagined that each person had their place in the world, where they could live happily; everyone would receive their daily bread, or maybe even acquire great riches. However, no one could know what sort of fate awaited them:

Tėvai, kaimynai	Parents and neighbors
Teip nusiminė,	Are upset and blue;
Greitai subėgo	Friends and relations
Visa giminė.	Come a running, too.
Vieni ramino,	Some try to gladden,
Kiti gąsdino,	And some to scare me,
O nė viens mano	But no one tells me
Laimės nežino.	What my fate will be.

(Balys 1958, No. 345)

Going abroad, the chance to start a different life was inspiring. Young people felt that their future life would depend solely on their will, their strength and their abilities, and that the will of their parents and their siblings would no longer influence them. American culture was more liberal, and the political views of former peasants who had become workers often shifted from right to left, and socialist organizations and new social activities emerged alongside the Catholic societies that had fostered traditional folk piety (Michelsonas 1961; Kučas 1975).

Men were probably more likely to feel like free, independent individuals and the forgers of their own fortune/happiness. Meanwhile, girls who emigrated complained in their songs that they left Lithuania "without their share of inheritance", "with no dowry, only a chaste face" (LTR 543, No. 498; LTR 521, No. 33).

SONGS RESEMBLING LETTERS IN VERSE: SENDING NEWS TO LOVED ONES

As migrants crossed the ocean, their parents worried how their sons and daughters were faring so far from home; at the same time the immigrants constantly wondered how their families were doing back home, whether everyone was healthy and well. In archaic cultures, various unusual phenomena in nature, such as sudden change in the weather, or unexpected behavior of birds and animals, might have been interpreted as bad signs, omens. For instance, a bird perched on the windowsill was seen as a messenger, as if it wanted to say something, bring news. However, at the end of the nineteenth – beginning of the twentieth centuries, when literacy was more widespread, parents and other family members would expect to receive a letter. According to British scholar Martyn Lyons, whose research compares letters of soldiers from World War I with those of immigrants to America, "[w]riting home, in this context, was

a means to preserve some continuity with the life they had known, to connect themselves with the previously stable values of the family, the land and the village community. Writing was a way to protect something of their individual identity" (Lyons 2013: 28). The less literate emigrants would seek out a more literate Lithuanian who could articulate the news they wanted to report. More enterprising compatriots took advantage of this: the Lithuanian-American printing houses printed letter-postcards (one of the first Lithuanian publications in the USA), embellished with drawings, texts of the Holy Scriptures, hymns or songs. They were distributed along with newspapers and books by emigre book carriers – clever agents known as peddlers. They would load up their suitcases with a variety of printed materials and head to the towns where Lithuanians lived. In the Lithuanian communities, they would sell thousands of ornate letters printed with songs and decorative flowers. According to one of them, the best times were Saturday nights, when the workers were paid, and Sunday mornings: "I walk down the street and listen to where singing or the sounds of an accordion might be coming from. In such a place you almost always find a Lithuanian family, and when you find one, you find others" (Michelsonas 1961: 205). Lithuanians who ventured on a long journey took instruments with them and played them at weddings,[11] as well as for their own enjoyment after hard work (Petrauskaitė 2015: 47, 90).

One can only guess how impressed the village was by a "gentlemanly" letter from America, which addressed the household with words written by poets, and enticed them to go to America – the land of paradise: "I greet you a thousand times and wish you success in your work, and in every step you take, may you always be as cheerful as the spring, as rich as the fall, and as healthy and strong as an oak tree" (Škiudaitė 2006: 758–759).[12]

One of the most popular emigrant songs "Aš, Lietuvos bernužėlis, laiškelį rašysiu" (I, a lad from Lithuania) sounds almost like a rhymed letter:

Aš, Lietuvos bernužėlis,	I, a lad from Lithuania
Laiškelį rašysiu,	Will write a letter,
Amerikos gyvenimą	I shall describe to all
Visiem apsakysiu.	The good life in America.
Amerika – gera šalis	America is a great place
Yra daug pinigų,	With much money to be had,
Čion nereikia bijot Dievo,	God need not be feared
Nei klausyt kunigų.	Nor strict priests obeyed.

Katrie dirba, prociavoja,	Those who work hard
Tie gyven kaip ponai,	Live there like kings,
Tur auksinį dziegorėlį	They own a golden watch
Ir juodą žiponą.	And a coat in black.

(Balys 1958, No. 342)

According to J. Balys, this song was composed in the United States, and was not only sung, but also published and distributed there. Barely literate people would sign a copy of this song and send it to their relatives as a postcard.[13] If there was no bad news, the simple need to make contact with one's family was most important. Such a letter would usually just mean that the person was alive, healthy, and doing well.

In researching war-historical songs of modern times, folklorist Vita Ivanauskaitė noted that "they are full of interesting variations of writing, sending and receiving letters. … The motif of writing a letter, filled with archaic images of a deep pool, murky water, a pike, a falcon, etc., fits particularly well and naturally with the theme of carrying and sending a message from war, which is predominant in the oldest war songs" (Ivanauskaitė 2004: 20–21).

> *The folkloric perspective of sending a letter is inseparable from the bearers of the message, which are firmly established in the tradition: in the songs, letters are sent via a steed, a bird, the wind and water. Only a few later works no longer mention these mediators.* (Ivanauskaitė 2007: 146)

Just like the creators of war songs, immigrant songwriters did not forget traditional imagery, as they longed for their homeland, dreamed of returning home in the shape of a bird, or wanted to send a messenger, such as a falcon, to carry news to their family. Many songs often sung by immigrants were based on the poem "Oi tu, sakal sakalėli" (Oh, you falcon, speedy falcon) by poet Antanas Vienažindys:

Oi tu, sakal sakalėli,	Oh, you falcon, speedy falcon,
Tu (j)aukštai lakioji.	Far and wide you flutter,
Išlėkdamas, parlėkdamas	Flying thither, flying hither,
Navynas nešioji.	Many news you utter.

(Balys 1958, No. 343)

In it, the imagery of a flying bird and sending a letter complement each other: the letter reaches the family like a bird, while a bird flies and brings long-awaited news like a letter itself. A similar image is also common on vintage postcards

and postal logos, showing a carrier pigeon delivering a letter in its beak. As emigration was a mass phenomenon, it was the subject of poems and songs both by Lithuanians who emigrated and by their relatives who stayed in their homeland. Songs of this genre were indeed "winged" – they spread on both sides of the Atlantic, and many of them were also recorded and documented in Lithuania.

EMOTIONAL TIES TO THE HOMELAND AND THE FOSTERING OF ETHNIC CULTURE

Those who immigrated at the end of the nineteenth – beginning of the twentieth centuries to seek a better life did not see themselves as "citizens of the world" and did not live in an "imagined community". They were people of an earlier era who were very attached to their places of residence in the homeland, to the Lithuanian landscape, as well as to their family members and all their relatives. When they left, many would take a handful of native soil with them, which they kept safe until death, with a request to put it in their coffin at their funeral.[14] The majority of them did not speak English, they socialized and married mostly among themselves. Even the names of the towns were given Lithuanian forms in their pronunciation. In this way Shenandoah became Šenedorius, Shamokin – Šimukai, Mahanoy City – Makanojus (Bradūnaitė-Aglinskienė 1997: 61).

In Svetlana Boym's view, the spread of nostalgia had to do not only with dislocation in space but also with the changing conception of time. Nostalgia was a historical emotion, and we would do well to pursue its historical rather than psychological genesis. There had been plenty of longing before the seventeenth century not only in European tradition but also in Chinese and Arabic poetry, where longing is a poetic commonplace. Yet the early modern conception embodied in the specific word came to the fore at a particular historical moment. "Emotion is not a word, but it can only be spread through words," writes Jean Starobinski, using the metaphor of border crossing and immigration to describe the discourse of nostalgia (as cited in Boym 2008 [2001]: 36). According to Žydrone Kolevinskienė, researcher of Lithuanian emigre literature, at first glance it seems that nostalgia is a longing for specific places, but in fact it is also a longing for another time (childhood, youth), as if in search of a "lost time" (Kolevinskienė 2022: 388).

Lithuanians, the children of farmers who grew up in the countryside, had difficulty adapting to the urban environment; they missed nature and greenery. In their imagination they idealized the Lithuania that they had seen so long ago, writing poetry about it as if it was the land of their dreams. The yearning for one's homeland is the deepest emotion expressed in immigrant songs; thus,

these songs do not lack elements of grief, sorrow, sighs, and tears. Longing is expressed through the use of the poetic formulas of love songs, talking about the homeland like a lover:

Lietuvos žemelė *už visas meilesnė,*	Lithuania's land is dearer than any,
Jos juoda duonelė už medų saldesnė.	Its black bread is sweeter than honey.

(LTR 947, No. 1437)

Balys observes that sometimes in their songs "they complain about the new land and complain about a lot of things. ... They admit that they left their native land for money and the hope of a better life" (Balys 1989: 139), for example:

Vai tu, aukse, tu sidabre,	Oh, you shiny gold and silver,
Susukai galvelę,	You turned my head around,
Aš už tave privažiavau	This is why I left my homeland
Svetimą šalelę.	For a foreign country.
Atvažiavau (į) Ameriką,	When I reached America,
Čionai apsistojau,	I was too elated,
Kai pamačiau aušros žvaigždę,	Dazzled by the evening starlight
Linksmai uliavojau.	Oft I celebrated.
Būtų linksma bernužėliui	It would not be bad to live here –
Svetimoj šalelėj,	Such a life sweet as this is –
Tik negirdžiu dainuojančių	But I miss the lovely singing
Lietuvos panelių.	Of Lithuanian misses.

(Balys 1989, No. 29)

Sometimes the immigrants who overwhelmingly missed their homeland and family decided to return ("Važiuosiu, liūliuosiu į tėviškėlę" (I'll travel, I'll sail to my homeland); Nakienė & Žarskienė 2019, No. 12), but most of them remained, returning to Lithuania only in their thoughts. Singer Uršulė Žemaitienė, who wrote down the story of her life at Balys's request, ended it with the following words:

> *If God would let me return to Lithuania, I would recognize every footpath, every tree. I remember every tree or rock and where each grew or lay. .... Even today I see everything in my imagination, and I don't forget anything, because I never let go of those images of my dear Lithuania during the 36 years I spent here. Lithuania stands like a mirror, like an altar before my eyes.* (Balys 1989: 18)

The songs also reflect on life in an environment where "there are compatriots, but there is no homeland" (LTR 508, No. 39), and these songs contain didactic lessons on how not to forget one's mother tongue and how to cherish Lithuanian identity:

Kas bus, lietuvi, pagalvok	Fellow Lithuanian, be careful
Ir savo vardą pagodok.	And honor your name.
Mokykis iš kitų tautų,	Learn from other nations,
Būt kultūringu ir gerbtu.	To be cultured and respected.

(Nakienė & Žarskienė 2019, No. 11)

Immigrants who had received a better education and achieved a higher social position realized that identity is not passed on by genes, spontaneously, but is only preserved if it is consciously nurtured. If Lithuanian books are valued in the parents' home, traditional festivals are celebrated and national food is prepared, then children do not forget their origins and do not distance themselves from the Lithuanian communities.

CHANGES IN THE CULTURE OF IMMIGRANTS

American Lithuanians lived in a free country, they did not have to endure political and ideological oppression, so they were more self-confident, willingly joined social and cultural associations, and regularly participated in various activities. Just like the Irish, who celebrated St. Patrick's Day every year, they began to commemorate St. Casimir, the patron of Lithuania, on March 4. They also held large celebrations on the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Assumption on August 15. They became generous donors, supporting Lithuanian political and social initiatives, and various cultural causes; the Lithuanian Association in America collected patriotic pennies and allocated them for book publishing and scholarships (Biržiška 1933: 466). Many people sent their hard-earned money to their relatives in Lithuania. Particularly many donations were collected in 1914–1918, during World War I, to support the families of those who died in the war, especially war orphans. The immigrants also supported the struggle for the independence of Lithuania in 1918–1920: "the workers laid hundreds of dollars on the altar of their homeland" (Biržiška 1933: 480). The second – and third-generation immigrants were equally active. Although they could hardly speak Lithuanian and communicated better in English, they remained sincerely concerned about Lithuanian affairs, and celebrated Lithuanian Independence Day – February 16 – with joy.[15]

It was often noted that American Lithuanians were more cheerful than their compatriots back home; they allowed themselves to be easily distracted and did not succumb to gloomy moods. Many would buy a gramophone and listen to the voices of their favorite singers on 78 RPM records. A very interesting mix of semi-traditional, semi-professional music can be heard on records made in the USA by big recording companies that catered to immigrant populations. Some of them were sold by thousands of copies and were often played in expatriates' homes. Perhaps the best-known performers were Antanas Vanagaitis's vaudeville troupe Dzimdzi drimdzi, which successfully toured Lithuanian-American communities between the two world wars, awakening Lithuanians through song and humor. Their records included not only songs but also comic dialogues. Balys has recorded a folklorized version of the song "Fordukas" (Little Ford) arranged by A. Vanagaitis:

Dirbau kasykloj	All week, rain or shine,
Per nedėlėlę,	Worked in a coal mine;
Kai sulaukiau subatėlės,	But on Saturday I scored
Savo naują Fordužėlį	Got my pay, took out my Ford
Pamėginėtie.	For a pleasure ride.
Pripyliau geso	Tuned up the motor,
Penkis galionus,	Gave gas and water;
Mano naujas fordužėlis	My well-worn and rattling Lizzy
Pasipurtęs kaip pašėlęs	Jumped up, backfired and went dizzy,
Tik strapalioja.	Raring to travel.
(LTRF cd 361/22)	

It is an imitation of a traditional song "I fed my steed the whole week long" and resembles some other folk songs. Instead of speaking to his steed as in traditional songs, the man speaks to his "iron horse"– his car:

Privažiavau mergelės namelį,	Oh, my Ford, my pal and playmate,
Ir paspaudžiau forduko ragelį.	Are you sad, 'cause you are old?
Aš atvykau po ilgų kelionių,	Let's stop at my girl's home,
Atbirbėjau su glėbiu svajonių.	See my dearest one.
Išeina mergelė	My beloved appeared –
Peintytoms lūpelėms,	Lips all paint and glowing,
Su šilkine skrybėlaite	From 'neath funny little bonnet
Ant gelsvų plaukelių.	Her light blue eyes showing.
(LTR cd 361/22)	

As Balys commented, "the ideal of beauty in Lithuanian folksongs is a blond girl with red cheeks and blue eyes. In this country a beauty wears much makeup, only the eyes remain natural blue" (JBl r 14). There are some, but not many, immigrant songs that can be called humoristic, with ironic and self-critical texts. These humorous songs reflect the process of industrialization, and the noticeable changes in the lifestyle of miners and other workers.

As generations changed, so did the culture of Lithuanian immigrants. While the first generation of immigrants were representatives of traditional culture and their musical self-expression was spontaneous, the musical activities of the second and third generations were already institutionalized and professionalized, including studying in music schools, participating in amateur musical activities, and becoming professional musicians. This was the case with Petras Vytautas Sarpalius (1886–1953), a second-generation immigrant, who led Lithuanian choirs, mixed instrument and wind ensembles and orchestras. J. Balys wrote about Sarpalius in his fieldwork diary:

> *Sarpalius was a great lover of folk songs, had a large library of Lithuanian music, song collections, etc. He was born in Pennsylvania, but his father came from Vilkaviškis and had come to America at the age of 19. His father played the violin and his mother loved to sing. Their son used to follow [marching] brass bands [in the street] when he was little, and at the age of ten he was already playing the violin by ear at weddings. After receiving a scholarship, he studied music in New York for two years. His father used to tell him to speak Lithuanian at table or else he would get a spanking. There were eight children in the family, and his brothers also loved music. Following J. Šliūpas's advice, he came to Chicago at the age of 21. He worked with Mikas Petrauskas, led choirs, composed songs based on the words of K. Binkis ("Dukružėlė" (Dear daughter), "Vakaras" (Evening), etc.), and had his own compositions in manuscripts. It was very interesting to talk to him. He knew a few folk songs that he had learnt from others here in America. He played a couple of his father's polkas on the violin. He spoke Lithuanian without an accent; he was a conscious Lithuanian. He had four daughters and one son and was happy that his son married a Lithuanian. His daughter, Birutė, became a pianist.* (Balys 1977: XVI)

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, brass bands – *benai* – were especially popular. They were usually affiliated with various fraternities and found in almost all mining towns – the first was organized in Shenandoah in 1885 – and in larger cities. Usually, these bands consisted of miners and other workers with no musical education, who could not read

notes or play any wind instrument before joining a band. The societies would purchase the instruments and hire the band leaders. Some bands, consisting of more skilled players, could reach a considerably high level of performance, and represented not only their society or town, but could also participate in public events, and got invitations from other national communities. Lithuanians took great pride in their bands that played a repertoire different from the American ones. Brass bands would express Lithuanian identity and nationality and promote the name of Lithuania in the multicultural environment of the USA. They performed in almost all Lithuanian social community gatherings (Žarskienė 2020). Lithuanian choirs played a similar role. The first ones were established in the Lithuanian parishes of Pennsylvania. Church choirs became extremely popular at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries. Their primary task was to sing during services and represent the parish at various religious and social events, keep up national identity and foster patriotic sentiments among immigrants. At the end of the nineteenth century non-religious choirs were formed especially by left-leaning and other free-thinking organizations. Choirs prepared concerts for their fellow Lithuanians and drew in public to various other types of events (Petrauskaitė 2015: 156–187).

Lithuanians in America did indeed demonstrate their musical abilities – the twentieth century saw many professional singers, violinists, pianists, composers and directors. A strong generation of Lithuanian intellectuals grew up in the USA in the families of the educated people, who preserved the Lithuanian identity and supported their compatriots during World War I and during the struggle for Lithuanian independence. The first generation of immigrants and their descendants, along with the second wave of immigrants who came as World War II refugees, preserved Lithuanian identity related to patriotism and national sovereignty. For decades, while Lithuania was occupied by the Soviets, they cherished their national culture and believed in the liberation of Lithuania.

CONCLUSIONS

The formation story of the Lithuanian diaspora in America is not exceptional; it is also perfect for representing the cultural situation and development of European immigrant communities in America more generally. Those who immigrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not see themselves as the "citizens of the world"; they were people of an earlier era – most of the Lithuanian immigrants of that time were rural dwellers, farmers. When they came to the USA, they settled close to each other, established Lithuanian communities, and created their own Lithuanian cultural environment. The immigrants

who participated in the creation of America's industrial society, who worked in mines, slaughterhouses, and factories, found it difficult to adapt to the urban lifestyle, since they missed greenery, nature, and the familiar landscapes.

As the research of J. Balys's recordings reveals, the first-generation immigrants to a foreign country overseas brought their traditional culture with them. Despite being surrounded by a foreign culture, they always remained Lithuanians in their hearts and lifestyle; they tried to make sure that their children, born in the USA, would speak Lithuanian. Traditional songs and singing strengthened them and helped maintain an emotional bond with their homeland, yet these songs could not replace it. Unfortunately, some things cannot be replaced.

Immigrant songs can be called nostalgic songs about love for a lost homeland; most often they are melancholic and sentimental. Some of the songs resemble poetic travel narratives or rhymed letters sent to relatives. In their poetic and musical expression, they are close to late war-historical songs and love songs and share similar emotional states with songs of these genres. A smaller proportion of immigrant songs are humorous, reflecting changes in lifestyle and leisure activities, and the influence of American entertainment culture. There are also quite modern-sounding songs that talk about the conscious preservation of one's mother tongue and native culture, and express the ideas of Lithuanian national rebirth and the importance of national identity.

Many immigrants would buy a gramophone and listen to the voices of their favorite singers. By listening to the records, they learned Lithuanian folk songs not by reading musical notes, but in an old-fashioned way – by ear. In this way, the records certainly helped to preserve the singing tradition.

NOTES

[1] The first known and perhaps the most famous Lithuanian in American history was Alexander Carolus Curtius. The Lithuanian nobleman had degrees in medicine, law and theology and was invited to direct and teach at the Latin school founded in New Amsterdam (now New York) (Kučas 1971: 13).

[2] In Pennsylvania, Juozas Būga also collected songs from early immigrants in 1950. Elena Bradūnaitė-Aglinskienė did the same job during the aforementioned 1972–1973 expedition. She recorded 247 songs from Lithuanians still living in coal-mining towns. A selection of 40 songs from this collection (9 of them describing the immigrants' destiny) was published in 1994 (Aleksynas & Ramoškaitė 1994).

[3] In 2022, once this article was already accepted for publication, a second collection edited by the same authors appeared: *Lietuvių dainos JAV, įrašytos Elenos Bradūnaitės (1972) / Lithuanian Folksongs in the USA, recorded by Elena Bradūnas* (1972).

[4] From J. Balys' speech recorded in the USA and transmitted at the award ceremony of the National Jonas Basanavičius Prize on February 15, 1995, in Vilnius (LTRF k 2212). Cited quotations of Jonas Balys translated by Elena Bradūnaitė-Aglinskienė and Vaiva Aglinskas.

[5] From J. Balys' speech recorded in the USA and transmitted at the award ceremony of the National Jonas Basanavičius Prize on February 15, 1995, in Vilnius (LTRF k 2212).

[6] This innovation reached Lithuania later. Magnetic tape recorders were first produced around 1955 by the electronic company Elfa in Vilnius.

[7] P.V. Bohlman in his article "Traditional Music and Cultural Identity: Persistent Paradigm in the History of Ethnomusicology" noted that since the nineteenth century or even earlier, documentation and data gathering were considered as the most important things in the research field of ethnomusicology (Bohlman 1988).

[8] J. Balys recorded about 20 immigrant songs: LTRF cd 355 (67, 70, 85), LTRF cd 356 (57), LTRF cd 358 (30, 47), LTRF cd 359 (8), LTRF cd 361 (18, 22, 37, 38, 48, 71), LTRF cd 362 (73, 77), LTRF cd 363 (33, 59), LTRF cd 365 (16), LTRF cd 369 (40).

[9] Lyrics translated by Nadas Rastenis.

[10] It is interesting to note that J. M. Burkus, who wrote around 70 poems that became songs, never left Lithuania. At the same time, the composer, organ player, choir master, actor, journalist and public figure, A. Vanagaitis, immigrated to the USA in 1924. Once there, he established a vaudeville troupe Dzimdzi drimdzi, conducted choirs, participated in the production of the first Lithuanian opera *Birutė*, founded the journal *Margutis*, and composed vocal pieces as well as harmonized Lithuanian folk songs (Petrauskaitė 2015: 354–386).

[11] A wedding feast among Lithuanian immigrants was described in Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle,* written in 1904 and published in 1906.

[12] Letters from America not only "comforted" relatives, but also sought to entice a new workforce to the USA, thereby lessening the potential of the homeland. Intellectuals who noticed this tried to stop this process by publishing articles in the press and attempting to educate the new arrivals in other ways. The immigrant press often stressed that "letters of American Lithuanians written to relatives in Lithuania play the most important role. They are full of lies, replete with boasts and bragging, ... which entices the best minds away from their country" (Eidintas 2021: 92).

[13] From a recorded lecture by Jonas Balys on immigrant songs (JBl k 56/1).

[14] "The Lithuanian farmer is so attached to his land that provides for him, that he considers it to be sacred, prays to it, kisses it, and fights for it because it is his greatest treasure. He has sacrificed his blood and life many times to defend it. When he is torn from his land, he feels like an uprooted tree, which quickly wilts. When emigrating from their country, many bring a bundle of their native soil, which they request to be included in their coffins when they die" (Balys 1966: 15).

[15] Lithuanian independence was declared on February 16, 1918. In the aftermath, there were various military clashes with both Soviet Russia and Poland.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

JBl – Jonas Balys Fund of the Lithuanian Folklore Archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore:

JBl ft – photograph from J. Balys Fund

JBl k – cassette from J. Balys Fund

JBl r – manuscript from J. Balys Fund

LTR – manuscript fund of the Lithuanian Folklore Archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

LTRF cd – CD fund of the Lithuanian Folklore Archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

LTRF k – cassettes fund of the Lithuanian Folklore Archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

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