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The Latvian Ministry of Culture has delegated its statutory function in music information to the Centre, and finances the Centre's activities.

The LMIC collates and provides information not only on Latvian composers and their works, but also on the Latvian music scene - concerts, festivals, competitions and music institutions. The Centre facilitates contacts between foreign and Latvian music institutions, composers, performing artists, music publishers and the media. The LMIC takes care of Latvia's representation at international music exhibitions and fairs, publishes CDs and informative materials.

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EDITORIAL

Ināra Jakubone

This time, we will talk about careers, compliments, creativity and crises. About dreams and ideals. And anniversaries, of course.

Arnolds Klotiņš – in my mind the most distinguished Latvian musicologist – celebrated his 80th birthday in 2014. A couple of years ago, he published a phenomenal study titled “Music Under Occupation”, yet for our publication he offered an essay about the music historian at a strange time that some call the end of history...

Next year, the composer Romualds Kalsons – whose works include several symphonic hits, including the Violin Concerto and Clarinet Concerto, and who still says, “I like fast music” – will also be celebrating his 80th birthday.

And we also honour the Emīls Dārziņš Music High School, which gave Gidon Kremer, Baiba Skride, Mischa Maisky, Andris Nelsons, Pēteris Vasks and many other well-known people their first skills and understanding of music. Composer Imants Zemzaris writes about the school, which he himself attended and at which he has taught now for over 30 years.

Last year, Riga enjoyed being a European Capital of Culture. This year, for its part, was marked by the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Do such political and economic factors influence musical life in a country, and if yes, how? Answers can be found in the articles about the rebirth of opera genre in Latvian music that was stimulated by Riga’s year as a Capital of Culture, thanks to two whole new performances at the Latvian National Opera. Answers are also provided by the new regional concert halls in Rēzekne, Cēsis and Liepāja, co-sponsored by EFRD.

And also, the MINSTREL project, supported by the European Commission's "Culture" programme, in which the Latvian Music Information Centre participated.

"I congratulate Latvia for being the birthplace of such talent" – such words have been said about conductor Andris Poga, who, according to Marina Bower, the head of artistic management at the Albert Sarfati agency, has done in four years what it takes others ten years to do in terms of his career. Poga has been the Chief conductor at the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra for two years already, which is a great achievement of our own musical management, that is, the ability to hold on to internationally successful talent and keep some of it at home.

Although, it turns out that often our new stars aren't even all that eager to leave home. One example is the Osokins dynasty of pianists: father Sergejs and his sons Andrejs and Georgijs. Georgijs, by the way, graduated from the Emīls Dārziņš Music High School just last year.

As an aside, despite the quite fatalistic title of his essay, Klotiņš urges the creators, interpreters and researchers of music to not believe in the end of history but instead to believe in the rich future of our nation and its arts, including music.

We can only agree with Klotiņš. And tell about a project begun by Egīls Šēfers, one of Latvia's most talented clarinet players. Not waiting for the audience's applause and despite all crises, Šēfers has begun to create a national label called "Skani", through which he hopes to give the entire world a taste of Latvian music and musicians by 2018, the 100th anniversary of Latvia's independence. For my part, I hope that in a couple of years' time we will say it was a success story.

Arnolds Klotiņš

THE END OF HISTORY AND THE MUSIC HISTORIAN



A year before founding the Latvian Conservatory (1919), Jāzeps Vītols returned from St. Petersburg to German-occupied Riga on the so-called opera train. In today's parlance, it was a chartered train, but a charter under unusual military and political circumstances, in which the soloists and employees of the future Latvian Opera crossed the ceasefire line between Soviet Russia and Imperial Germany in the train's freight cars. Among them were also the Latvian Riflemen's Orchestra musicians. In order to organise something like that, the lawyer Andrejs Frīdenbergs – in Vītols' words, the main man in this *va banque* game – had illegally crossed the front line three times together with conductor Teodors Reiters. Thus they had obtained all the necessary wartime permits and documents, including a visa (possibly forged) from Mr. Lunacharsky, the first People's Commissar of Education of Soviet Russia. In his review of the Conservatory's first ten years, Vītols wrote that "this page from Latvian cultural history deserves to be recounted in all its details; most likely, it will never be repeated".¹

I will leave the fulfilment of Vītols' wish for another time (even though he wrote about the subject to some extent in his own memoirs) and continue this time with another story from 1918. Namely, in the same year Vītols returned to Riga, Jean Cocteau's collection of musical aphorisms *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* was published in Paris. No, this is not the time for us to lament about how behind the times we were then, while others in far-off lands had already accomplished this and that. Because in St. Petersburg Vītols and Reiters had already countless times listened to Claude Debussy and early Stravinsky – the main objects of discussion in *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* – and were quite capable of participating in the conversation. Instead, I would like to use *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* as a starting point for a few comments about style in 20th-century and contemporary music. And I would also like to touch upon the situation of the music historian when he or she must describe various historical eras, when style in music (as well as in the other arts) was approached much more seriously. When style was considered a given, something without which art possibly did not even exist. When people attempted to speak of an era's style and historical styles, the changing of which seemed to also express something about changes in society's spiritual condition.

Truly. Without trying to criticise anyone, because, firstly, that is not the intention of this article, and, secondly, the post-modern disregard for style is not just the prerogative of music or of Latvia, but it also affects other arts and much, much broader areas, I wish to ask: when describing a piece of music from the First World War or, say, the Second World War, is it worth it for a music historian today to compare it with the historical style of that time or other styles? Is it worth it if today all of these styles tend to be freely mixed and some of them are simply repeated without batting an eye?

We shall return to this question. But first, something from Jean Cocteau. I like his *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* because in it musical style receives no less significant attention than, say, during the famous Glückist and Piccinist wars or the 18th-century Buffonist battles, and still we're speaking of the 20th century. Apparently, it seemed to the author of *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* that clarity in terms of style will eventually come if the first blow is given to something like stylisation. And so he wrote, "The bright minds have discovered the word 'stylisation' to describe that which lacks style."² That may sound harsh, if not to say more. Let us consider it a polemic exaggeration, because the main task of *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* was to aesthetically defend Eric Satie by discrediting Stravinsky. As we know, stylisations and Neoclassicism, which were still only knocking at the door, soon gathered speed, went its course and, eventually, also reached Latvia.

And still, two important questions awaited answers from musicologists. The first question: can a reproduction of a historical musical style by a composer of today still be considered a proper style, that is, does it preserve the former meanings of its language? And the second question:

under what conditions does a historical musical style or individual idioms thereof acquire new meanings?

The Frankfurt School of social theory, and especially Theodor Adorno, turned against stylisation in the 1930s and 1940s. He called it an attempt to mask the condition of humans in the world with those forms of the pre-individualistic era – that is, with Renaissance, Baroque or Classicism musical forms – that were only truly able to model the human condition during their respective times, whereas now they've become a counterfeit ideology. I cannot refrain from reminding the reader that Thomas Mann melded some of Adorno's ideas into his well-known novel *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn, Told by a Friend*, a novel that, in my mind, is relevant for all musicians. In his conversation with the tempter, Leverkühn timidly defends the use of these pre-individualistic-era forms when he says, "One could bring the game a level higher and play around with forms that we know are already lifeless."³ By that we are to understand the usefulness of old musical forms and styles for parodies. But old forms and styles have also had much broader uses. In the 1970s, a new concept appeared, namely, polystylistics. In the second half of the 20th century we often perceived music not from the point of view of style, but of meta-style. In such a meta-style, then, various styles are merely means of expression or signs.

So far, we have stayed with fairly familiar truths and opinions, and it seems the end of history is still quite far away. But we will arrive at the end soon enough, although it will be with the kind intercession of post-modernism. For now, I will only use the short definition to characterise post-modernism: "an over-turnable historical continuum". Yes, so simple – "an over-turnable historical continuum" – and by that it has been stated that one can even turn history the other way around and work with any former artistic style, with all that's ever been. But before we approach post-modernism any closer, we must clarify one more thing. The above-mentioned, that in 20th-century music a historical style is to be perceived as a sign, invites us to bring musical semiotics into the discussion and ask what exactly, from the point of view of semiotics, are these forms discussed by Adorno and Mann that have been abandoned by the living spirit.

In the language of musical semiotics – and here I base my thought on Finnish semiotician Eero Tarasti's works – the spirit abandons forms if the composer is working with overly verified communication structures, with musical idioms that have been worn down and over-used. What, in this case, is "spirit"? It is the intellectual challenge necessary to achieve a proper and full aesthetic result, which is triggered by the conflict the composer provokes between the tested and the new.⁴ A painter becomes a bland imitator of reality and cannot express an idea – in other words, something that cannot be depicted – if he cannot deform natural forms and put them together again in new relationships.

Likewise, a composer cannot create new content if he/she does not combine previously tested structures in a new way. So, the mere imitation of historical forms and styles cannot in itself unleash new content. However, if intellectual mediation is included or new relationships formed during the process, an historic musical style or specific idioms of it gain new meaning.

But – and this is the big "but" – there is one condition in today's world that hopelessly complicates this seemingly clear view. Namely, in our modern-day world, the post-modern situation itself provokes new meanings of earlier forms in the listener's consciousness. The well-known, verified means of style and expression – or, from the standpoint of semiotics, the musical signs – provoke unexpected and unforeseen semantic effects, independent of the composer's intentions and even counter to them. Why does that happen? Because, in the post-modern cultural situation we find ourselves in today, the former hierarchies of values, previous ideas about development from the simple to the complex, and the old links and relationships between phenomena have all been

torn down. The former systems and models of ideas that organised the world in our consciousness are being lost. In addition, this post-modern situation is not only an invention of philosophers; there are serious suspicions that it is based in reality.

A vulgar example nearer to music. Formerly, in traditional society, certain musical genres, types and idioms achieved and secured their meanings in the listener's consciousness in a way that was completely dependent on their primary use. Let us assume that in the pre-radio era, when a rural child found himself in a church or, say, at a funeral, or – the very opposite – at a country dance, then his mind began to associate the music he heard in each of these places with likewise very different emotional situations. In other words, the clear correlation between music and the corresponding situations gradually created and secured primary meanings of various musical idioms that were just as clear and defined. Yes, these meanings were only primary and, by later listening to various types of music, these meanings could vary and become more complex. Nevertheless, the basic foundation of the musical meanings had been engraved.

Nowadays, the formation of these primary meanings is much more difficult and complicated; it often happens quite arbitrarily and inappropriately. Because the never-before-experienced reproduction of all forms and kinds of music through mass media and other means of technical transmission creates such an unprecedented semantic plethora and even chaos around the person, and this influences the inexperienced listener's consciousness in quite an unsatisfactory way. This leads to some strange curiosities. For example, during Soviet times, citizens associated serious symphonic music with state funerals because they were used to hearing such music all day long on the radio and television when a high-standing statesman died. Every time when people heard longer periods of symphonic music on the radio, they began to wonder who had died.

But something similar can happen today as well. If a young person who has hardly heard any symphonic music – and there are more and more such youths due to the fact that commercial radio no longer plays symphonic music – hears one of Gustav Mahler's symphonies for the first time, do you think he will hear and feel anything of its tragically romantic and expressionistic irony? He might enjoy some of the joyous melodies in the work, but he may very well misunderstand the meaning of their use. Especially if he hears a kitschy arrangement set to the contemporary rhythms of entertainment music, the ambivalence of which he will be unable to appreciate. And, if we return to the rural child in the church who encountered an idea of ceremoniousness in music, then today such an experience is not guaranteed, because ever more commonly the music in his church is popular music accompanied by guitar.

But enough of primitive examples to illustrate the essence of the issue. In real life, of course, we encounter the same thing in more complicated and nuanced forms. We must approach the end and, first of all, the end of history.

So, if we are living in a post-modern situation, but post-modernism means that the historical continuum has been turned on its head and mixed up, then the end of history truly seems quite logical. Post-modern theoreticians were the ones who first bravely said that humans no longer have history. True, the end of history has been predicted almost forever, although in a slightly different meaning, beginning with the first Christians in Rome, who frightened their compatriots with the idea of apocalypse. For his part, Hegel understood the end of history more as an expected condition, when humankind's struggles for social and moral justice will have ended and everything will have levelled out and calmed down. But for today's cultural philosophers, the end of history does not mean that nothing will really happen anymore; instead, they see it as a time when people are beginning to look upon their history and understand changes in the world, in the past, present and the foreseeable future in a radically different way. One of the most prominent post-modern

theoreticians, Jean-François Lyotard, says quite directly: "The post-modern situation means that people no longer believe universal ideas and scenarios."⁵ By that he means that all the messages from myth or philosophy regarding the unity of the world, about the necessity of systemising world views, about the old and the new, the good and the evil and other opposites and so on – all of these so-called meta-stories are discredited and useless. There is uncertainty, ambivalence and pluralism all around.

If so, if ideas about the opposites of old and new and of evolution – not to mention progress – are void, then, of course, the changing of historical styles has lost its meaning; opposites of styles and even style itself as a category turn out to be one of the general ideals post-modernism has done away with.

But, our original question remains: what should a well-meaning music historian, who has grown up with the conviction that style is necessary, with preconceptions about historical and individual styles, do? Applying the standard of style to some contemporary compositions would not be sensible nor beneficial. But what to do about compositions from the past, from eras when post-modernism had not yet seemingly freed us from the demands of style? I will illustrate this issue with one last primitive example.

According to archives, a large review of Latvian music took place in Riga in 1946, and this review was also viewed by guests from cities across the former Soviet Union, among them Aram Khachaturian. He dared to criticise a piano concerto by a fairly popular Latvian composer of the time for frivolity in regards to style; he practically deemed it eclectic. Witnesses have told me that during the concert, Khachaturian even bowed toward the music several times, as if greeting someone. When asked after the concert why he did so, he answered that he had greeted the great spirits of the past and their styles, which he had heard in the concert. But what should a historian do today? When placing this concert in the annals of history, should the historian take into account Khachaturian and his out-dated notion of "eclectic"? I have not noticed this word used in music reviews for the past ten or fifteen years. Although, if we were to meet a Khachaturian – or, God forbid, Jean Cocteau – today, anything would be possible.

Let us leave this question unanswered; let us bid it farewell with a smile. And let us take a last look at *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*, in which, despite all of its stylistic passions, even Cocteau knows how to smile. By making fun of Wagner and Debussy as well as Stravinsky regarding the fact that their styles do not correspond with Cocteau's demands, it's as if – with a masked seriousness – he is unloading the atmosphere with an array of listener types. And these listeners are divided into various types according to their attitude toward innovation in music.

So, I quote: "Types of audiences:

- 1) Those who defend today in art by using yesterday and also anticipate tomorrow (one percent).
- 2) Those who defend today by destroying yesterday and do not acknowledge tomorrow (four percent).
- 3) Those who do not acknowledge today in order to defend yesterday, that is, their today (ten percent).
- 4) Those who imagine that today is pure torture and arrange a meeting with the day after tomorrow (twelve percent).
- 5) Those from the day before yesterday who accept yesterday in order to prove that today oversteps the permissible boundaries (twenty percent).

6) Those who have not yet understood that art continues and who imagine that art has stopped yesterday in order to maybe begin again tomorrow (sixty percent).

7) Those who are not cognizant of the day before yesterday nor yesterday nor today (one hundred percent)."

We could now applaud Cocteau's humour and end here.

But, in the light of our topic, it turns out that all of these 100%, who do not understand yesterday or today or tomorrow in art, are ready post-modernists.

Thus, with Cocteau's light hand, post-modernism turns out to be placed in a slightly comic and doubtful light. And so, in concluding, it is easier for me to say with conviction that even in the post-modern era Latvian composers will not lose their feeling of tension between the past, present and future. Their works will continue to contain not only references to history in the form of citations or models but also a true awareness of history. That means there will be attempts to become aware of who we are, where we come from and where we are going. That they will not submit to the most conservative trends of post-modernism, which claim that the main thing now in art is to relax and resign oneself to the idea that nothing new is needed. Incidentally, in terms of such a silencing, the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama is quite near to the end of history; his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man* played the main role in spreading the notion of "the end of history" around the world.

In other words, I hope that creators of music, as well as its interpreters and historians, will not truly believe that history has ended. In addition, that it has not only not remained in the past, but that we and our country still have a rich history in our future.

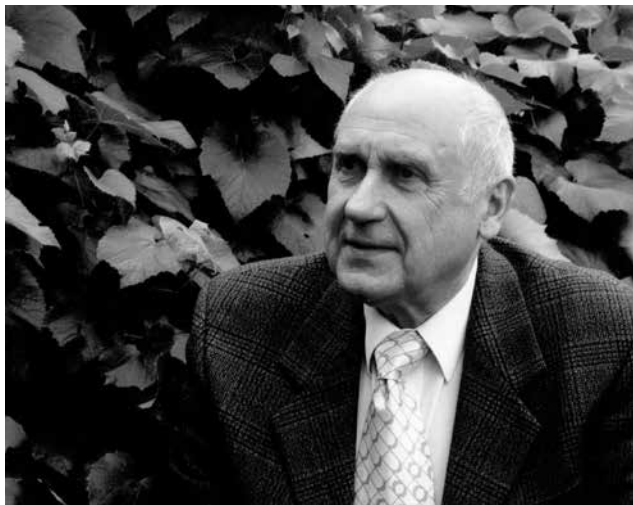
¹ Vītols J. *Pārskats 1919-1929//Latvijas Konservatorija, 1919-1929*. Rīga, 1930, p. 9.

² Cocteau, Jean. *Le Rappel à l'ordre*. Paris, 1948, p. 37.

³ Mann, Thomas. *Doktor Faustus*. Frankfurt am Main, 1990, p. 332.

⁴ Tarasti, Eero. *Sémiotique musicale*. Limoge, 1996, p. 34.

⁵ Lyotard, J.-F. *La condition postmoderne*. Paris, 1979, p. 14.



Baiba Jaunslaviete

THE MUSIC OF ROMUALDOS KALSONS: TEXTS AND SUBTEXTS

"I like fast music. It is more common for Latvian music to have slow tempos. I'm more like Haydn's symphonies: three fast parts, one slow part. Latvians have one slow part, then an even slower part, the third part is slightly faster, and the fourth part is slow again. That's the way it is. I have fast music..."¹

With these words – half jokingly, half seriously – Romualds Kalsons (b. 1936) has etched out his place among Latvian composers. On the one hand, one could say it is an accurate self-description; the dynamism, motor-like quality, dance-like element and spiritedness resulting from faster tempos are characteristic of Kalsons' music. On the other hand, this self-description is quite incomplete because it does not reveal several significant aspects of his music. What are these aspects? This article was born out of an attempt to find at least a partial answer to this question.

In order to understand a composer's creative personality, one must keep in mind his or her sources of inspiration. For Kalsons, one of the most significant of these is literature. His taste in this sphere is manifested, primarily, in vocal music, whether it is chamber works, choral compositions or opera (such as his lifework, *Pazudušais dēls* (*Prodigal Son* (1996))). Since the beginning of his career as a composer, Kalsons has been attracted to poetry not simply as a generator of mood or emotional backdrop but also as a refined and complex art; his compositions of vocal music are based on modern day poetry with philosophical or psychological subtexts. The meaning of a poem is revealed as clearly as possible, and the current trend of simply turning a text into a sonoric element has more or less completely passed Kalsons by. "[...] he loves poetry very much – a superbly interesting text is a huge plus for vocal music," says Ieva Parša, a notable chamber singer and interpreter of Kalsons' music, about one of the characteristics of the composer's vocal works.²

At the beginning of his career, at the turn of the 1960s, Kalsons focussed on poetry by foreign authors, in contrast to the then-dominant trend of national motifs. He put to music the words of Omar Khayyam (*Song Cycle*, 1958), Maurice Carême (*Five Songs*, 1959), Jacques Prévert (*Six Songs*, 1960), Federico Garcia Lorca (*Six Songs*, 1961) and Yevgeny Yevtushenko (*Seven Songs*, 1962), in the Russian language at that. Latvian poetry dominated his later compositions, in particular the works of Kalsons' contemporary and acquaintance Ojārs Vācietis, whose words provide the foundation for more than 40 of Kalsons' compositions. The composer said of this collaboration: "He's the best poet in the Latvian world of poetry and the one I've used the most [...]. [His poetry] has both humour and sarcasm, [...] saturation and philosophy. Even his children's poems have subtexts – children understand one thing, but adults can see the subtext."³

These words characterise not only Vācietis' poetry but in part also Kalsons' own compositions. In a way, he can be considered a spiritual relative of Mahler and Shostakovich in Latvia (musicologist Inga Žilinska also mentions Schnittke as a counterpart⁴); the humour, sarcasm and even parody mentioned in the quote above are unmistakable elements of his style. In Kalsons' music, the use of popular genres and simple, dance-like formulas combined with ambiguous poetry texts often lead to philosophical or psychological subtexts. One vivid example is the third song from the cycle *Etīdes par nebeidzamību* (*Studies on Infinity* (1975)), which has the keyword fear; in it, Vācietis' ironic message about the fear of others (who are hiding a fear of themselves) is presented in a waltz rhythm, albeit with an uncharacteristic, squarely grotesque melody. The rich use of popular genres' elements is apparently based on impressions from the composer's childhood: "My family loved music – I still have an old photograph of my grandfather playing the clarinet and my father playing the accordion. [...] I watched my father play the accordion; it was a 120-bass accordion. I later propped it up on a club chair, stood next to it and then played *Kur tu tecī...* [a popular Latvian folk song – B. J.]. Then came Strauss waltzes and, of course, popular music – other kinds of music were rarely heard in Jelgava [the town where Kalsons grew up – B. J.]."⁵ These unique transformations of popular genres attest to the composer's desire to create a dialogue, or confrontation, between various worldviews.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Latvian music was hit by the so-called folklore-wave. This was manifested in a heightened interest in folklore materials, especially the oldest, pagan elements thereof. Kalsons' music was also influenced by this wave; for his compositions in the 1970s he chose texts by contemporary Latvian poets, which often contained motifs from folklore, including the vocal chamber cycle *Ķēžu dziesmas*

(*Songs of Chains*, text by Māris Čaklais, 1974) and the cantata *Atvadvārdi* (*Parting Words*, text by Ojārs Vāciētis, 1979). And here we see the principle of dialogue/confrontation between two worldviews that is so close to Kalsons – the composer does not so much accent the authenticity of archaic folklore as he focuses on the interaction with a different worldview (not an epically generalised one, but an individual and psychologically refined, even nervous, modern view). Such dialogues between the folk and the conditionally contemporary – one switching to the other, as if in an associative flow – are characteristic of many vocal compositions by Kalsons. In this sense, a fine example is provided by the first of four etudes in *Etīdes par nebeidzamību* (*Etudes on Infinity*) for voice and instrumental ensemble. The vocal melody with its joyous and fearless promise of loyalty and betrothal (“Here is my hand, here is my life...”) has a diatonic, folk character, while the accompanying flute part follows a diminished scale (alternating between tones and half tones), which adds a completely different, subjective expression of doubt, concern and sorrow to the piece. And here we must note that the diminished scale is an almost ubiquitous attribute in much of Kalsons’ music; one could even say it is almost the main scale used in his music. Kalsons himself describes the diminished scale as “a feature I cannot get rid of”.⁶ His music, however, does not reflect the formerly common usage among composers (for example, Rimsky-Korsakov) of the diminished scale to associate with a fairy tale or science fiction mood; for Kalsons, the diminished scale primarily describes dramatic, tension-filled and psychologically contradictory characters.

The juxtaposition of different worlds is most visible in Kalsons’ opera *Pazudušais dēls* (*Prodigal Son*, 1996). Its premiere was among the biggest events in late 20th-century Latvian music, and the work was justly awarded with the prestigious Latvian Great Music Award. The opera is based on the drama written by Rūdolfs Blaumanis in 1893, which, in turn, as the title suggests, is based on the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. In Blaumanis’ version, however, the son of a patriarchal, proper and wealthy Latvian farmer incurs many debts due to his undisciplined way of life. In despair, he decides to clear his debts by secretly seizing his father’s money and then genuinely beginning a new, better life. One night, during a storm, as he tries to quietly steal into his father’s room where the money is kept, the father hears the noise and, possibly not recognising his son and mistaking him for an intruder (the drama does not clarify this issue), shoots him. This plot, used by Ojārs Vāciētis and Jānis Streičs as the foundation for their libretto, inspired Kalsons to an expressive juxtaposition: on the one hand, the portrayal of life in rural Latvia through a pastoral and vital folkloric tone and, on the other hand, the mood of fatalistic foreboding that continues throughout the opera, symbolised by the above-mentioned diminished scale, albeit in the form of very varied and individualised melodies. The foreboding that smoulders in the subtext starts at the very beginning of the work. Sometimes it powerfully breaks through to the forefront, only to abate for a while, until it reaches its culmination and fulfilment in the opera’s finale. But there is a third sphere to the opera, which Blaumanis outlined only vaguely but Vāciētis’ libretto and Kalsons’ music, corresponding to their styles of art, addressed in more depth. This is the grotesquely sarcastic – or Mahleresque, in the broad sense – sphere associated with the tavern scenes. The interaction of all these spheres comprehensively reflects the various aspects of Kalsons’ style.

In addition to vocal compositions, instrumental music has always formed just as important a part of Kalsons’ creative work. Style-wise, the music follows three general principles. The first involves very pronounced allusions to the Neoclassical and Baroque (the 2nd symphony *In modo classico* [1968], *Concerto grosso* [1977, 2003 and 2005, the second one is titled *Hendeliāna*], the concertino *Serio é buffo* [1993]). Kalsons’ distinctly polyphonic style is also a reference to the Baroque tradition. This draws parallels with the already discussed sphere of his vocal music – Kalsons’ attitude towards poetry texts and the counterpoint between direct thought and subtext reflects this polyphonic thought process. In his instrumental music, the polyphony is sometimes announced right in the title of the work (*Prelūdija un kanons* for two flutes [1987], *Polifoniska studija* for orchestra [1992]),



Romualds Kalsons
with his spouse,
singer Irēna Kalsone,
first performer
of numerous
compositions by
Kalsons

but it is manifested more often simply as a principle of development, for example, the exposition of the main theme according to the principles of the fugue in the first part of String Quartet (1973). As an aside, this string quartet has gone down in the history of Latvian music as one of the few examples of the 12-tone technique; due to the conservative nature of Soviet cultural policy, this technique arrived fairly late in Latvia. In describing the international significance of this composition by Kalsons, Agne Stepiņa, a former member of the Riga String Quartet and currently an associated professor at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music, remembers: "The Riga String Quartet played this piece in a number of countries, and it was always very highly regarded."⁷

The second general principle in Kalsons' music – the Neoromantic aspect – is revealed in a variety of works, including *Romantiskā poēma* (*Romantic Poem* for orchestra (1968)) and the 4th symphony *Jauni sapņi no vecām pasakām* (*New Dreams from Old Fables* (1977)). Musicologist Inga Žilinska comments: "Perhaps the conversation [in Kalsons' music – B. J.] takes place between the various aspects in himself – the slightly gloomy and the reserved romantic and the man of sharp-tongued, youthful humour. In his youth, the composer loved Tchaikovsky's music, and was himself rather romantic in his music. As time went on, life tempered his style, sometimes making it outwardly splintery and biting but, when light allows itself to be revealed, the music sounds warm like a folk melody."⁸

The third principle, noticeable even in Kalsons' instrumental music, is the echo of the new wave of folklore, which can be heard in his suites *Kāzu dziesmas* (*Wedding Songs* (1979)), *Gadskārtu ieražu dziesmas* (*Seasonal Songs* (1985)) and *Precību dziesmas* (*Betrothal Songs*, (2003)) for orchestra. These are some of the most outstanding examples of orchestration in Latvian music, which can apparently be explained by several factors. First, Kalsons studied composition under Ādolfs Skulte, who is known in Latvian music as a great master of orchestral colour (in describing the richness of Skulte's orchestral colour, researchers have sometimes used the extravagant hues of the South, which are in such contrast to the reserved Northern tones common in Latvian music). Another explanation for Kalsons' vivid orchestration might be his second higher education; in addition to studying composition at the Latvian Academy of Music (1960), he also studied symphony conducting there under Leonīds Vigners and Jāzeps Lindbergs (1971). Later, in the 1970s, he worked as the assistant to Vassily Sinaisky, who was at the time the artistic director of the Latvian radio and television orchestra and later the conductor emeritus of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. Regarding this period in his life, Kalsons has said, "Sinaisky gave me the most; it was with him that I finally understood what conducting really means."⁹ It was during this period that Kalsons composed *Kāzu dziesmas*, which is one of the most popular works of Latvian symphonic music from the second half of the 20th century. In his book *Latviešu mūzikas virsotnes* (*Highlights of Latvian Music*), musicologist Jānis Torgāns discusses several of the interesting orchestration effects used in this piece of music, for example, the metallic clinking, jangling, twanging and rattling timbres in the third part, which, paradoxically have been achieved "even though percussion instruments are used very frugally ([...] except the xylophone)".¹⁰

Also among Kalsons' orchestral works is a composition that, like his opera *Prodigal Son*, can be considered the quintessence of his style. It is the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* composed in 1977, which is, along with Pēteris Vasks' concerto *Distant Light* (1997), one of the most often played concertos beyond the borders of Latvia. The four-part piece contains distinct drama and spirited frenzy (in the first part), grotesque and sarcasm (in the second part, the scherzo) and allusions to music of the past as a symbol of all that is pure and clear (particularly in the slow section of the third part, in which the beginning and end contain variations in the spirit of an ancient Baroque dance, while the middle section contains variations of a Latvian folk song). The concerto ends again with a grotesque, sarcastic mood that is associated with the aggression of the masses against the values expressed by the symbols of the past. Only in the coda does this wave of aggression abate, and the composition ends ambiguously, without resolution, in a contemplative mood. Alongside the

emotional vividness of the music, an essential factor that helped determine the success of this piece is, of course, the composer's superb knowledge of the possibilities of the violin (Kalsons himself once seriously studied the violin); the violin part is beautifully complex but also gratifying for the player.

Despite the great emotional tone of his music, Kalsons has always been a composer who finely hones the form of his compositions. The careful planning he invests in them reveals the intrinsic intellectual and rational aspect of his music. In many cases, the very title of a composition hints at some quality of its structure. For example, it turns out that Kalsons has an affinity for mosaics, and he has composed *Mozaika* for piano four hands (1982) as well as for orchestra (1991). Interestingly, Kalsons himself emphasises the principle of concentricity, the most consistent manifestation of symmetrical order, in the titles of two compositions: *Fantāzija un pasakalja par koncentrisku tēmu* for organ (*Phantasy and Passacaglia on a concentric theme* (1992)) and *Koncentriskas aprises* for orchestra (*Concentric Contours* (2000)). Musicologist Līga Jakovicka also focuses on the composer's attention to structure: "Even in as traditionally free a genre as the vocal chamber cycle we see a similarity with the four-part symphony cycle (*Etīdes par nebeidzamību*)."¹¹

It is apparently no coincidence that we examine the aspect of structure when characterising still another side of Kalsons' work, namely, his many years as a pedagogue at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music, where he has been a professor since 1987. After winning the 2010 International Rostrum of Composers Award, Kristaps Pētersons, one of the professor's students, described studying under Kalsons and specifically accented the attention paid to structure: "Before then, my approach was intuitive; but, if you lack the structure, then it's a very dangerous road."¹²

It should also be noted that Kalsons perhaps also instilled in Pētersons his great interest in literature that is rich in psychological and philosophical subtexts. On the whole, however, Kalsons' students represent a very broad range of personalities. In addition to Pētersons, his students also include Santa Ratniece, Alviņš Altmanis and Māris Lasmanis. This variety of creative signatures among his students¹³ might be linked to another quality of Kalsons mentioned by Pētersons – his great tolerance towards his students, allowing each to develop his or her own individuality, as did Kalsons' own teacher, Skulte.

Of course, this article provides only a general glimpse into Kalsons' creative personality and aspects of his musical style. Many of his compositions would each warrant a full study (and several already have). But, above all, they deserve to be heard and have earned the attention of audiences not only in Latvia but worldwide. In Kalsons' music, a vital spiritedness interacts with a deep and meditative self-immersion, a lyrical melodiousness with a sharp and often dance-like sarcasm, allusions to the Baroque with Latvian folk songs, tonal harmonies with serial technique. All of the above, plus Kalsons' specially selected and always high-quality literary sources, bear witness to him being a noteworthy representative of postmodernism – a composer whose music vividly and many-sidedly, through texts and subtexts, reflects modern life as well as the context of the past.

¹ Interview with Romualds Kalsons by Līga Paegle. See: Līga Paegle. *Romualda Kalsona "Etīdes par nebeidzamību": stilistikās iezīmes un atskaņojuma alternatīvas*. Master's thesis (at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music), Riga, 2015, p. 26.

² Kalsona balss [materials prepared by Gundega Šmite]. *Mūzikas Saule*, 2011, no. 5, p. 9.

³ Interview with Romualds Kalsons by Alise Koknēviča. See: Alise Koknēviča. *Kora loma Romualda Kalsona operā „Pazudušais dēls”*. Bachelor's thesis (at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music), Riga, 2012, p. 6.

⁴ Kalsona balss [materials prepared by Gundega Šmite]. *Mūzikas Saule*, 2011, no. 5, p. 9.

⁵ Ilze Šarkovska-Liepiņa. Romualds Kalsons. In modo classico. *Mūzikas Saule*, 2005, no. 5, pp. 22–25.

⁶ Ilze Šarkovska-Liepiņa. Romualds Kalsons. In modo classico. *Mūzikas Saule*, 2005, no. 5, pp. 22–25.

⁷ Kalsona balss [materials prepared by Gundega Šmite]. *Mūzikas Saule*, 2011, no. 5, p. 9.

⁸ Kalsona balss [materials prepared by Gundega Šmite]. *Mūzikas Saule*, 2011, no. 5, p. 9.

⁹ Interview with Romualds Kalsons by Alise Koknēviča. See: Alise Koknēviča. *Kora loma Romualda Kalsona operā „Pazudušais dēls”*. Bachelor's thesis (at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music), Riga, 2012, p. 5.

¹⁰ Jānis Torģāns. *Latviešu mūzikas virsotnes*, 2010, pp. 175–176.

¹¹ Līga Jakovicka. *Romualda Kalsona vokālie cikli*. Thesis (at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music), Riga, 1977, p. 55.

¹² Kalsona balss [materials prepared by Gundega Šmite]. *Mūzikas Saule*, 2011, no. 5, p. 8.

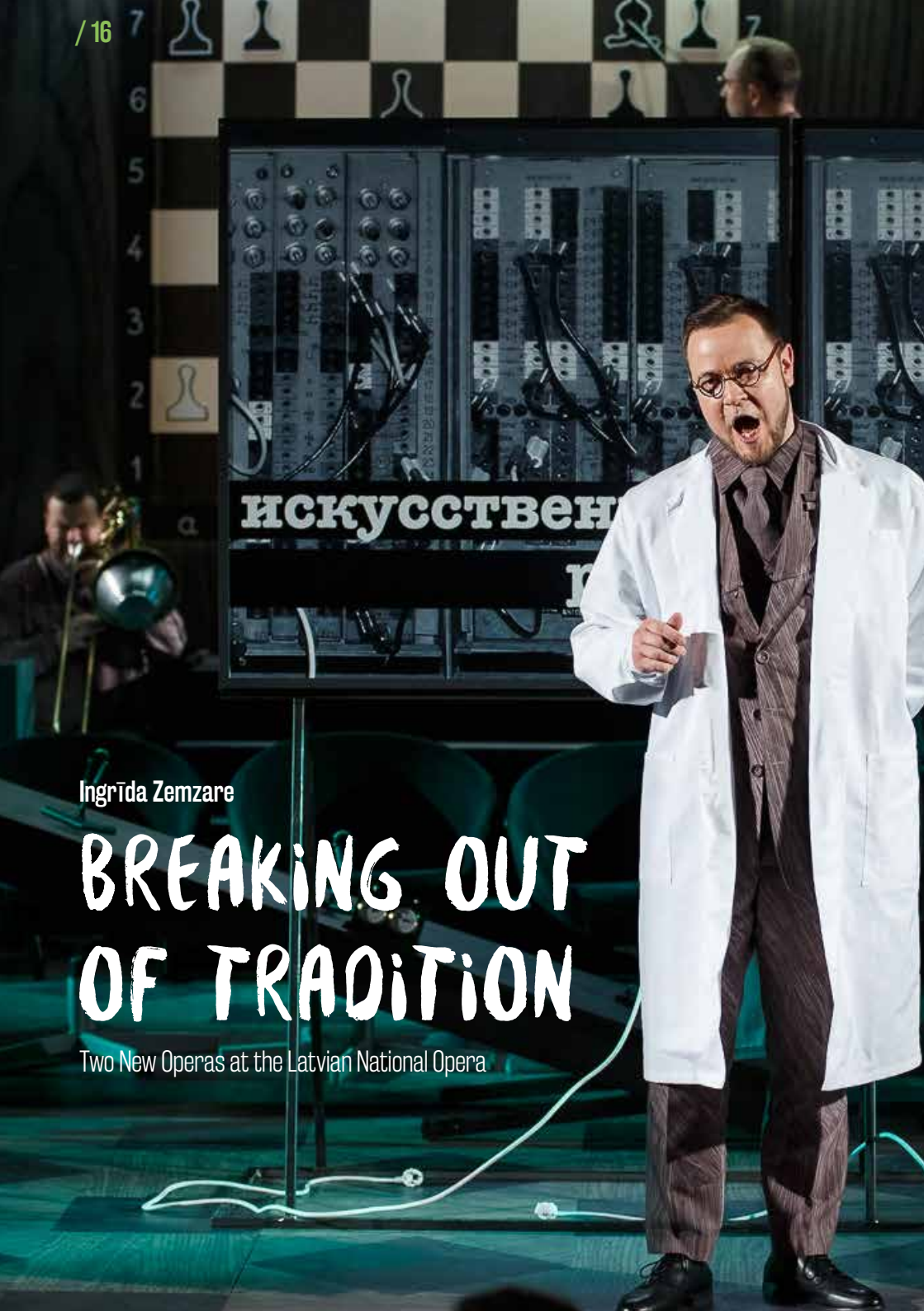
¹³ Ibid.

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Ingrīda Zemzare

BREAKING OUT OF TRADITION

Two New Operas at the Latvian National Opera



When Rīga was the European Cultural Capital in 2014, among the most outstanding cultural events were the premieres of operas by two Latvian composers at the Latvian National Opera – Kristaps Pētersons' *Mikhail and Mikhail Playing Chess* and Artūrs Maskats' *Valentina*. They were long expected, because no new Latvian operas had been staged in Latvia for a critically long period of time (Andris Dzenītis' *Dauka* in 2012 was only staged as a concert performance, and the last premiere of a full opera was a decade before that).

Both 2014 operas speak to something that is of essential cultural and historical importance in Latvia – the role and importance of Jewish culture in Latvia's multicultural environment during the historical twists and turns of the 20th century. Both focus on distinguished individuals – global chess champions Mikhail Tal and Mikhail Botvinnik (Pētersons) and the film critic and World War II survivor Valentīna Freimane (Maskats). The librettos of both operas are based on documentary materials – archival evidence and eyewitness comments about the playing style of Tal and Botvinnik, and Valentīna Freimane's 2010 autobiography, *Adieu, Atlantis*, which has also been translated into Russian, Lithuanian and Finnish. Its German translation was released in 2015 together with performances of *Valentina* in Berlin on May 19, 2015.

So much for what the two operas have in common. We have to look at each of them separately, of course, because they are completely different phenomena.

Valentina is a traditional opera with a large orchestra and choir alongside the soloists.

Mikhail and Mikhail Playing Chess, in turn, is a modern multimedia performance, a wonderful chamber opera with a symphonic sweep in spite the fact that the opera's orchestra does not take part. It is a realm of sound in which there is every opportunity for directing, set design and the performances of the actors to manifest themselves. It is, first and foremost, a theatrical event.

Mikhail Against Mikhail: Drama XXI

Kristaps Pētersons and Sergejs Timofejevs. Opera-lecture "Mikhail and Mikhail Playing Chess," conducted by Ainārs Rubiķis and Atvars Lakstīgala, directed by Viesturs Meikšāns. World premiere in the New Hall of the Latvian National Opera on March 12, 2014.

At the centre of the opera is a legendary game of chess that changed the entire world of chess and more. On March 26, 1960, at the age of 23, Mikhail Tal, who was born in Rīga, beat the Soviet chess legend Mikhail Botvinnik, who was the world champion at that time, thus becoming the youngest world chess champion in the history of the sport.

The authors have declared this multimedia performance to be an opera-lecture. A breath-taking dramaturgical intrigue interchanges there with a biography of the two players, a sociological examination of the particular importance of chess in forming Soviet ideology, a presentation of documentary photographs and authentic eyewitness statements, and an essay about freedom as an inviolable component of creativity.

Richard Wagner, author of *Opera and Drama* (1851), probably would welcome *Mikhail and Mikhail*. His ideas about the confluence of music, poetry and myth have manifested in this case with all of the resources that are available in our century. We face a perfect performance in which all components are equally important. The music cannot be separated from the text or the drama representing an eternal contradiction between the maximalism of youth and the balance of maturity, between the dizzying aspects of talent and patient work, and between artistic intuition and scientific pragmatism. The team behind the opera has succeeded in presenting these contrasts as an issue that was of great importance during the latter half of the 20th century – creative freedom in a totalitarian society.

The score by Kristaps Pētersons is brought to life by two ensembles of vocalists and instrumentalists, each conducted by a different conductor. The chess game between the black pieces (Mikhail Tal) and the white pieces (Mikhail Botvinnik) is conducted by two conductors – the Kings – Ainārs Rubiķis on the black side and Atvars Lakstīgala on the white side. The whole chessboard is subject to them – the bishops, rooks, knights and pawns, as well as, of course, the two Queens – Ieva Parša and Baiba Berķe.

There are no star-making roles for the soloists in this opera, and the instruments, too, have specific “roles.” The composer himself, for instance, plays the role Rook H8, which is for a double bass, while the other black tower, A8 is sung by baritone Jānis Ādamsons. There are 32 participants in the performance – 14 chamber musicians, eight vocalists, eight dancers and two conductors, or just as many performers as there are pieces in a game of chess. There are no major arias, no individual solos, and it is all but impossible to get a really good idea about this opera just by listening to fragments from it.

Two years ago, at the 9th International KREMERATA BALTICA Festival, Ainārs Rubiķis conducted a fragment from *Mikhail and Mikhail Playing Chess*, but it was very clear that the music was not yet complete. The orchestra requested Kristaps Pētersons to supplement the work. The fragment grew from four to six or seven minutes, Kremerata Baltica played it again, but the sense of incompleteness was still there.

I understand now that it was not possible to overcome this, because the total opera-lecture must be heard, seen and experienced from the first measure to the last. Only then can we understand the intention of that refined music and its implementation as a way of breaking out of tradition and creating an excuse for the revival of tradition. In *The Composer's Part*, Pētersons writes that “it is important that chess has a very strict network of traditions, and those who ignore it simply cannot win the game. The history of chess (just like that of music, by the way) has very much to do with the present. It seems that nothing new is possible and that there are only variations on everything that is old. It is important that sometimes we can break through this draconic and systemic network and thus rejuvenate it. Such moments are sacred. Mikhail Tal achieved that in his game against Botvinnik in 1960.”

The foundation for Kristaps Pētersons’ pragmatically structured construction of sound is an original system that transfers the moves of chess pieces into the language of music. Accordingly, the music itself seems to be as “boring” as a game of chess if it is watched carelessly from the sidelines. If, however, we take an in-depth look at the chess game, we can experience unprecedented passions, and that is exactly what happens in Pētersons’ opera.

Sergejs Timofejevs, who is a “real” poet, has created a libretto that is interesting to hear and understand. Timofejevs has published four books of poetry in Rīga and three in Moscow and St Petersburg. His expressive and modern Russian language is another bridge to join the black-and-white sides of the game, and this bridge involves high-tension wires. The documentary and biographic facts form lively lines, and that gives room for the viewer’s own conclusions. Mikhail Tal was born into the family of a Jewish physician in 1936 in “bourgeois” Rīga, while Mikhail Botvinnik was born into the family of a Jewish physician in 1911 not far from St Petersburg during the era of the Russian Empire. There were probably different experiences in their lives, though both chess players spoke Russian at home. Sergejs Timofejevs writes about an era in which intellect was still of value even though the personal freedoms of individuals were so very much limited. The librettist has succeeded in the role of a very objective observer and story teller, while the audience is brought into the adventure in a seemingly indirect way. This is similar to the way in which sports commentators talk about both sides – the black, the white, the points that have been scored, the opportunities that have been missed.

In his review of *Mikhail and Mikhail Playing Chess*, the critic Jegors Jerohomovičs wrote that “the new opera has been staged in a modern and stylish way that would also be appreciated by Gerard Mortier.”¹



The creative team behind the performance includes set designer Reinis Suhanovs, choreographer Kirils Burlovs, video artist Carlos Franklin, and costume designers from Mareunrol's. Along with the instrumentalists, roles are performed by opera soloists Dana Bramane, Armands Siliņš, Juris Ādamsons, Ieva Parša, Andris Lapiņš, and others.

The set design is laconic, but surprisingly impressive. Have you ever noticed that the "black-and-white" elements of a chessboard actually is manifested as a "creamy brown" appearance, because chessboards are usually veneered? That is exactly what all of the characters on the 32 squares of the board are wearing. Mareunrol's has dressed all of them in individually modelled marbled apparel that creates the sense of a compact chess board and increases associative links to the generalisation of the game of chess. During the second act of the opera, the most ordinary pieces of furniture turn into an expressive element of stage art. The surface of the table is deformed, and the benches are angularly broken. The players sit down on those benches, and the viewer sees an optical illusion of the type that is seen in the deep subway stations of Moscow, where the people who are sliding down the escalator seem to be tilted at a 45 degree angle. This sudden deformation sharpens up attention, surprises the viewer and, most importantly, raises to a new level the spark of humour that occasionally manifests in the dialogues, the music and the choreography.

This is by no means the first musical performance that is based on chess. Last year, the Matt Charman play *The Machine* was staged in Manchester and New York, featuring the game played by Garry Kasparov

against the Deep Blue IBM supercomputer that was built by Taiwanese-born Feng-Hsiung Hsu. "A piece of software beat the best and the brightest," Charman told the BBC after the first performance. It may be that after arriving in America, the two geniuses – Garry Kasparov and Feng-Hsiung Hsu – experienced a collapse of their dreams. It is also possible that the game between the two Soviet chess Grandmasters – Mikhail Botvinnik and Mikhail Tal – caused a transformation in their value system.

The team of director Viesturs Meikšāns has succeeded in visualising these simultaneous human dreams and fears on stage in a playful, light, but not careless manner. The dream of artificial intellect that is so close to Mikhail Botvinnik's exacting approach to the game of chess, and the dream of free and soaring creativity, as represented by Tal's talent. I suspect that we are all afraid of Pygmalion, of the independence of a robot, of the possible human catastrophe due to our helplessness in relation to machinery or software, and of the idea that Google's mission is to know everything that you want even before you realise that you want it.

I believe that the creative team behind *Mikhail and Mikhail Playing Chess* is not only indirectly pointing us toward this existential fear, but also forcing us to think about who we really are and about how the world is changing. What is the drama of the future or *Drama der Zukunft*.

Valentina

Composer Arturs Maskats, libretto by Liāna Langa and Arturs Maskats, conductor Modestas Pitrenas, director Viesturs Kairiņš, set designer and costume designer Ieva Jurjāne, lighting artist Nicol Hungsberg. World premiere at the Latvian National Opera, December 5, 2014.

Valentina is an opera that depicts essential and very dramatic elements of Latvian history and culture between 1939 and 1944 and the way in which these affected various nationalities in the country. Valentīna Freimane spent her childhood in Riga and Berlin, where her father was a lawyer for the UFA Film Studio, and her mother was an enchanting social figure around whom the greatest stars of global cinema gathered. After returning to Rīga, Valentīna's family was caught unprepared by the Holocaust. Her parents and young husband perished, but she herself was hidden by various saviours all the way until the end of the war. Today Valentīna Freimane is 93 and lives and works in Berlin and Riga.

The score of the opera is very expressive, nuanced, abundant in different musical genres and forms. Linguists tell us that place names survive for the longest period of time and can be used even to discuss migration of peoples. Likewise, in the history of music, the genre is like a driving belt among the various eras. Whether a waltz has been composed 200 years ago or yesterday, it is easily recognised and brings its own message. In the history of Russian music, for instance, the waltz represents unfulfilled love. The waltzes of Johann Strauss, by contrast, represent the full enjoyment of life. In any case, a waltz, march or song immediately creates a specific nuance of expression. Maskats has used a great many genres and relevant signs in his opera, and so the music really does tell a story in and of itself. *Valentina* can be listened to on the radio or on a recording, and the music itself will conjure up the image of the era. Music clearly is independent and of decisive importance in *Valentina*.

When it comes to the libretto and staging of the opera, however, there are a few ambiguities. One might ask which opera has a good and literary valuable libretto. In Latvian music, I can only name a few – the Ojārs Vācietis libretto for Romualds Kalsons' *The Prodigal Son* (after a short story by the Latvian author Rūdolfs Blaumanis), Jānis Mediņš' *Fire and Night*, for which the poet Rainis produced the libretto, Imants Ziedonis' libretto for Imants Kalniņš' *I Played and Danced* (also based on Rainis), and Ilona Breģe's *Living Water* (after a play by Māra Zālīte). All of these operas were basically dramas of symbols.



Inga Kalna and Jānis Apeinis as Valentina and Dima. The voice of the internationally renowned soprano Inga Kalna served as the inspiration for Valentina's part and image.

Arturs Maskats: "Valentīna Freimane's life story is closely linked to events in the history of Latvia and Europe, allowing us to reveal the panorama of the era in all of its colourfulness and contradictions. The most dramatic moments in Valentina's life coincided with major 20th century events, including the loss of Latvia's independence, when there was a need for enormous spiritual strength to survive in physical and moral terms. The opera is not just about politics, though. It is interwoven with a brilliant love story and deep emotions."

Unfortunately, in representing these vivid events and emotions, the authors have gone down a certain path of indecisiveness. Valentina's deeply personal experiences seem to compete with a yearning to offer an excessively detailed historical background. It really seems that the producers of the opera have not agreed among themselves on a unified key to the production. Even if the key were the indecisiveness of post-modernism, I got the impression that the producers did not really have a clear sense of what they were doing and how. The opera would have gained a lot if it had been produced in a more indirect, less specific and symbolic way.



For that reason, I was most touched by the summarizing choral scenes, particularly in terms of the children's chants at the beginning of the opera, as well as the march to nowhere – Valentīna's separation from her parents, who join the Jews on their way to the ghetto, along with her difficult choice to leave them so that she would survive. By the means of brilliant genre-related contradictions music shows survival as heroism. The march had something that very much reminded me of the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem, where one room is devoted to murdered children. The room is completely dark, but lit by a panoply of stars on the ceiling. You walk through the dark, starlit room, where the names of the dead children are called one by one. In Jewish culture, it is very important to name people. It is something that could be called the naming of the destiny of a specific people, because a person who is named is alive and has an influence on us. Perhaps that is why the opera is titled *Valentīna*. This had to be a very personal story to represent the destinies of all of those people who were involved in the war and the Holocaust in one way or another. If this personification exists, then the viewer and listener lives along with the story.

I cannot really understand the set design of the opera, which emphasises the realities of the era, but does not really offer an idea of the Rīga in which Valentīna's family lived in the 1930s. The narrow two-level streets and the set decorations created the impression of a very different Rīga, one more reminiscent of the Jewish ghetto. Valentīna Freimane, however, has written about a very different Jewish social level to which Gidon Kremer's parents also belonged. For them, Paris and Berlin were certainly much closer than the Latvian countryside, which also appears in the opera.

I plucked up the courage to recommend the composer to translate the text of the opera in various languages, depending on the character and the situation. The first scene is set in the flat of Valentīna's parents, and the sung conversations could have been in German. The duet with Dima, Valentīna's first husband, who perishes while trying to save Valentīna, could have been sung in Russian, while the visit by Valentīna and Dima to a farm could have been presented in Latvian. That would allow the opera as an artwork to confirm Valentīna's arrival and growth in the multilingual Latvian environment of Rīga and in Latvian culture, in which, at the end of the day, she remained. After all, *Adieu, Atlantis* was written in Latvian, too.

¹ Jerohomovičs, J. "While You are Alive, Checkmate is not Possible," *Kultūras Diena*, 1 April 2014.

Ināra Jakubone

MINSTREL VOICE

Did you notice the European Commission's "Culture" programme logo on this brochure? That's because we published it with financial support from the EC "Culture" programme. But that's not the only reason. This is by far not the only good deed we have done over the past three years with so-called "European money". And that's what this story is about – how, why and what exactly happened in Latvia and elsewhere in Europe thanks to the EC "Culture" programme's MINSTREL project, among the organisers of which was also the Latvian Music Information Centre.

MINSTRELS AND CORSETS

Musicians are and will always be wanderers. And for this reason the word *minstrel* – those wandering singers and musicians of the Middle Ages – is so appropriate a name for this 21st-century project. The name was the idea of the initiator and main organiser of the project, Greece's Institute for Research on Music and Acoustics (IEMA). Altogether, music information centres in eleven European nations, including the Latvian Music Information Centre (LMIC), helped realise the IEMA's vision from 2013 to 2015. Our Greek colleagues won exactly one million euros for the three-year cooperation project. Later, each partner was able to apply for a sum of money that it could more or less realistically manage.

True, after having been tightly corseted by the economic crisis of 2008 and budgets of subsequent years, many servants of the arts in Latvia dream of loosening the ties a bit and, yes, simply taking a deep breath of air....

Being bound by the corset of a strict budget is difficult and can even be unhealthy, and for the past five years the employees at the LMIC can attest to that. After all, filling the financial gap created by the economic crisis involves actions that are not at all related to a musician's professional skills. Writing grant proposals and reports now takes up so much time and energy that there is often little strength left for the actual work.

And precisely for this reason – for the health of one's organisation or institution or field of work – employees in the tightly corseted cultural sphere have in recent years looked with such longing towards European cultural grants.

Of course, the ideas and goals of the EC's "Culture" programme are very, very positive and sympathetic. (In 2015 the EC cultural support programme was renamed "Creative Europe") The programme has three guidelines: to promote the dissemination of art created in Europe, to promote the mobility of European artists and employees servicing the art industry, and to promote professional training.

What can be better than that, one might ask? Yes, but the amplitude that the EC expects from project applicants is quite intense. And, if money has been granted, then we must work hard to fulfil our goals to the best of our abilities.

The LMIC has participated in European Commission projects twice. The process has not been easy – it is unexpected, unpredictable, unprecedented and, yes, even difficult. It is exacting, sometimes annoying and usually unanticipated.

For example, the obligatory condition of 50% co-financing for EC-financed projects, in my opinion, necessarily (and also completely justifiably) makes applying to participate in an EC-financed project a huge gamble for us, considering the modest cultural budget of Latvia and, even more so, considering the microscopic budget of the LMIC. Even if you only apply as a co-organiser, a partner in the project. And even if the funding you're applying for is "only" a few tens of thousands (I use quotation marks because the entire annual budget of the LMIC may be only a few tens of thousands).

Therefore, whenever we've agreed to participate in a European project, I've always asked myself whether the adventure needs more courage and fearlessness, or more shamelessness, or does it need more altruism and naiveté. I guess I don't really have an answer to that. In any case, it definitely requires nerves of steel. The LMIC has always participated in EC projects as a co-organiser. I truly and without envy admire those in Latvia who have been able to acquire EC funding as coordinators of a project. In music sector, it seems the only ones to have achieved this are the "Porta" world music festival and the "Sound Forest" festival of electronic music.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES AND EXPERIENCE...

Of course, we would love to say that the problems and difficulties encountered during the project were quickly forgotten. But the experience and skills one acquires are enduringly valuable.

For clarity, I will describe some of the problems and difficulties.

First of all, whether one wins the grand prize – EC funding – depends on one's readiness to take on work that corresponds to the EC's guidelines. In other words, ensuring international exposure, or trans-national mobility, for music and musicians. And this leads to the first problem, namely, organising concerts is not and has never been the primary task of the LMIC. In Latvia, this is done by other institutions, both state-run concert organisations and private agencies.

Due to its very limited budget and human resources the LMIC seeks out opportunities to delegate concert exchange functions to professional concert organisers. Sometimes this is successful, other times not. The method of distributing EC funding – first, 40% of the sum from Europe, then the next 30% after a little while, and the final 30% some time after the project has come to a close, plus the inevitable ambiguity regarding the 50% that have to be co-financed, frightens away most of the professional concert organisers in Latvia with whom we are ready to cooperate on this joy-filled mission of bringing Latvian music and musicians to European stages.

And so, the altruistic employees of the LMIC suddenly come to a realisation that they've again become involved in another brilliant project, mainly for the good of Latvian music in general, which offers so many opportunities as well as so much to do... by ourselves.

A HARD DAY'S WORK...

How can the scale and meaning of one such European project be measured? At least in the context of Latvia? Surely not in the hundreds of pages that have been written, copied, numbered, bound and stamped in an attempt to obtain co-financing. Then perhaps in the crossfire of emails in which one lands when a concert exchange has begun to take shape or is already quite near, when repertoires, playing times must be clarified along with summary texts, personal data, flight times, fees, hotel bookings, rehearsal spaces, rehearsal times, technical equipment, recordings and banquets (yes, also those). And then the contracts, agreements, instructions, declarations and so on. And then all the reports that must be written after it's all over...

Sometimes you begin to wonder whether life wasn't simpler and easier when you were bound by that financial corset.

But anyway. Again, we voted "yes". "Yes" to the opportunities provided by the EC's "Culture" programme to open up these paths and unknown trails to us, these divergences from the regular highways of concert life for our musicians. These carefully nurtured concerts of ours in Riga, Warsaw, Nicosia, Vienna, Lisbon and Žilina. Thanks to the MINSTREL project, our traditional singer Biruta Ozoliņa and DJ Monsta took part in the "Loop" festival in Cyprus and kokle player Laima Jansone and the group Foršpīl took part in the "KlezMore" festival in Austria. Latvian electronic music was represented and played by composer Ieva Klingenbergā at the "Electronic Geographies" festival in Portugal, while composer Pēteris Vasks headed to Slovakia for the performance of his 2nd Cello Concerto performed by Kristaps Bergs at the "Allegretto Žilina" festival. But our very first minstrel trail led us to Poland and the "Warsaw Autumn" festival, where the Spīķeri String Quartet performed with soloists Egils Šēfers and Toms Ostrovskis.

ON THE MINSTREL TRAIL, TOGETHER WITH THE POLES

As part of the MINSTREL project and Latvia's New Music Days (*Jaunās mūzikas dienas*), the fantastic TWOgether Duo from Poland performed in Latvia on March 26, 2014. Consisting of cellist Magdalena Bojanowicz and accordion player Maciej Frąckiewicz, the duo is a rising name in Polish contemporary music. In 2013, the two musicians won not only the annual Paszport Prize for culture awarded by Poland's largest weekly newspaper, *Polityka*, but also the Young Poland scholarship awarded by the Polish Ministry of Culture. The duo is currently very highly regarded not only in Poland but also beyond its borders. They have performed concerts worldwide and won several chamber music competitions. Thanks to the TWOgether Duo's superb concert in Riga, the audience was treated to the newest in Polish music as well as some Latvian music.

Despite the breach of English orthography conventions, the emphasis on the number two in TWOgether Duo's name is no coincidence. Even the musicians themselves doubted whether two such different and stubborn people could work together in a duo. In fact, they often come to a compromise (read: harmony?) only once they've stepped onto the stage in front of an audience, and then only because one simply cannot stop a concert once it has begun. But their rehearsals usually end in a mere fifteen minutes!

What keeps Bojanowicz and Frąckiewicz together? The feeling that, despite the constant stress and countless squabbles, they are nevertheless able to create, and to create together. And the fact that they play well. And the audience will definitely remember their concert at the Spīķeri Hall in Riga as a prime example of the beauty of creation and the true dedication of musicians.

In September 2013, for their part, our own clarinetist Egīls Šēfers, pianist Toms Ostrovskis and the Spīķeri Quartet headed to Warsaw Autumn Festival to take part in a MINSTREL event, bringing with them the music of Maija Einfelde, Santa Ratniece, Māriete Dombrovska, Pēteris Plakidis, Imants Zemzaris and Ēriks Ešenvalds. That year, works by Latvian composers were quite popular at the Warsaw Autumn festival; Frankfurt's Ensemble Modern played the music of Petraškevičs, Dzenītis and Pētersons, while the Silesian String Quartet played Dzenītis' compositions. Following the MINSTREL concert, 47-year-old Polish poet and literary and music critic Adam Wiedemann published an article about the Warsaw Autumn festival. Wiedemann calls himself simply a music lover, and what he writes confirms this – after all, he attended practically every event of the festival. His writing is full of exact, critical and often ironic remarks, and it seems the poet truly cares about what is planted and nurtured by contemporary composers in their figurative gardens and fields.

Wiedemann also attended the concert on September 28, in which the Latvian musicians performed. He later wrote:

"...I decided to attend this morning's concert of Latvian music at the Mazovia Centre of Culture and Arts, which turned out to be one of the most pleasant (if not the most pleasant) event of the festival. Of Latvian composers, we know Vasks fairly well, and also Plakidis a bit, but on the whole Latvian music is terra incognita – most likely because the obsession with the avantgarde passed Latvia by, and so we've only heard their euphonic music in this century, after the reevaluation of values through the prism of postmodernism.

"The concert began with a wonderful rendition of Lutosławski's *Dance Preludes* (actually, clarinetist Egīls Šēfers was the star of the morning), which was followed by Imants Zemzaris' *Warsaw Triptych*, which the composer wrote at the age of 23 after a visit to the Warsaw Autumn festival in 1974. One could expect that the composition sounds like a reminiscence of music heard at the festival, but it was nothing like that; it had a consistent 'intelligent minimalism' style, and only a few small flare-ups in the second part indicated that the young composer's experience also included a meeting with maestro



IMPREZA TOWARZYSZĄCA

Warszawska Jesień

Najwyższej Instancji Muzyki Słuchaczem

Sobota 28 września 2013, godz. 12.00
Mazowieckie Centrum Kultury i Sztuki
Warszawa, ul. Elektryczna 12

NOWA MUZYKA Z ŁOTWY

I

Witold Lutosławski *Preludia taneczne* na klarnet i fortepian (1954)
Imants Zemitaris *Variārus trēpika / Tryptyk Warszawski* na fortepian (1974)
Pēteris Plakidis *Romantiskā mūzika / Muzyka romantyczna* na skrzypce,
wioloneczkę i fortepian (1980)
Maija Einfelde *Scenārijs sverēndes vāri (Trīs dziedzjuņi mirstotajai jūrai) / Smutne
serenady (Trzy pieśni dla umierającego morza)* na klarnet i kwartet smyczkowy (1988)

II

Eriks Ešenvalds *Pēdējās vēstules / Ostatnie listy* na wioloneczkę i elektronikę (2007)
Māriņa Donbrovska *Anava / Pejzaži* na klarnet i elektronikę (2008)
Santa Ratniece *Abvāles / Plaustry miōdu* na kwartet smyczkowy (2005)
Imants Zemitaris *Balsi / Glos* na klarnet (1985)

Egīlis Šēters klarnet
Toms Ostrovskis fortepian

Spikeri String Quartet; Marija Spāriņa skrzypce, Anni Kortelainen skrzypce,
Ineta Abakuka altówka, Eriks Kiršfeldis wioloneczka

Słowo o muzyce łotewskiej Ināra Jakubere

WSTĘP WOLNY

Współorganizacja
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Kultura

Polish "TWOgether Duo" in Riga, March 2014

Witold." (Zemitaris was in Warsaw with a group of young Latvian artists, and their noisiness during a concert bothered Lutosławski, who was sitting alone up in the hall's balcony. Just a small detail, but I found this interesting enough to include in the introductory remarks to the concert in Warsaw. – I. J.)

Wiedemann continues: "Plakidis was represented by his *Romantic Music*, which centres on the interplay between the 'punctual' piano part and the expanded violin and cello phrases, with the instruments finally bowing to each other on some distant, mystical land. I will not list all of the composers' names here, because there were many. But I must mention two women: Maija Einfelde and Santa Ratniece. In her clarinet quintet *Sad Serenades*, Einfelde, a composer of the older generation, presented an expressive image of the 'dying sea.' For its part, the object of

the musical 'description' in the younger Ratniece's string quartet *Alveoles* was honey in all of its submissiveness, range of colours, aromas and tastes as well as the precision of its geometric wax cells.

"Latvian music did not so much surprise as captivate the listeners, allowing them to enjoy the music, without losing any depth or transparency, and especially to feel the special aura that one is likely to experience completely unwittingly in that music."

Of course, Wiedemann's article delights us. Our colleagues at the Polish Music Information Centre, who hosted the Latvians in Warsaw, just say "Well, well..." regarding that "most pleasant concert of the whole festival", but I have no problem finding an explanation for Wiedemann's praise. A slightly skittish feeling came over us at one point during the planning of the programme – how can it be that we're sending works that were composed thirty or more years ago to the Warsaw Autumn, the epicentre of contemporary music? But, when the moment arrived and I felt I had to justify our choice in the introductory words to the concert, I could calmly say that "The works you are about to hear need no introduction or explanation. They are able to stand on their own; they speak in a clear and unmistakable language of artistic imagery. They are a part of Latvian canon of contemporary music, just like the works of Penderecki, Górecki and Lutosławski, which we all listen to with such joy at the Warsaw Autumn festival."

What's there to deny? I am very happy that someone else also found our choice to be correct and fitting.

LATVIAN VOICE – FOR CZECH LISTENERS

Thanks to the MINSTREL project, we also had to contemplate Latvian music in the international context as we were preparing the selection for the CD supplement of *HIS Voice*, the journal of the Czech Music Information Centre. The editors had expressed a desire that the selections reflect "Latvian contemporary classical progressive music or alternative sound art". We therefore had to begin with an attempt to understand which Latvian composers fit this description.

Of course, we first turned to the generation now in its 30s and 40s, because they were the ones who insisted in the late 1990s that Latvian music needed a paradigm shift. One could say that it was the composers who were then in their 20s – Jānis Petraškevičs, Andris Dzenītis, Santa Ratniece, Gundega Šmite, Rolands Kronlaks – who began tearing down their own Berlin Walls.

"To speak Latvian in their music" – previous decades of Latvian composers, for example, Pēteris Vasks, Pēteris Plakidis and Imants Zemzaris in the 1970s and 1980s, considered this their main mission. They had very deliberately sought (and found!) a unique Latvian colour and message in their music. It was the time of Neoromanticism and Postmodernism in Latvia, which, of course, also had its sociopolitical reasons – cultural identity and the threatened status of the Latvian language and even the Latvian people as a whole under the Soviet regime served as a kind of absolute imperative in art, including the meaningful existence of music.

Those beginning their careers in the late 1990s, however, were free enough (in all senses of the word) to search for their impulses far and wide and in a wide variety of other aesthetics. They admired the music of György Ligeti and Brian Ferneyhough, Giacinto Scelsi and Kaija Saariaho; they studied the work of Magnus Lindberg and Franco Donatoni; they felt an affinity with the music of Gérard Grisey and Michael Finnissy. Until then, the avantgarde had not manifested itself in Latvian music as the consistent aesthetic and technical foundation of a single generation or even the creative work of a single individual. But this new generation of debutantes – the 20-somethings – were primarily

interested in issues relating to sound itself, to the substance of music. They were inspired by sonority, spectralism, structuralism and even the avantgarde aesthetic of the distant 1950s.

Leading Latvian musicians responded to the ideas of these young composers, and their experiments are enthusiastically realised by the conductors of the Latvian Radio Choir, Sigvards Kļava and Kaspars Putniņš. The Sinfonietta Riga and its conductor, Normunds Šnē, are also loyal partners in young composers' searches for the truth. For three years in a row, recordings by these artists won awards for Latvia at the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers (Santa Ratniece's ...*Sens nacre...* for instrumental ensemble in 2004, Mārtiņš Viļums' *Le temps scintille* in 2005 and Ēriks Ešenvalds' *Légende de la femme emmurée* for choir in 2006).

And so, the CD of new Latvian music (titled *Latvian Voice*) aimed at the Czech readers/listeners of *HIS Voice* included Santa Ratniece's *horo horo hata hata*, which was inspired by Ainu lullabies and hunters' prayers and leads listeners towards archetypes and the most ancient cultural elements as well as the almost physically tangible micro-world of sound in only the way Ratniece can. The CD also includes *Darkroom* by Jānis Petraškevičs, an expert of the so-called "new complexity", performed by Frankfurt's Ensemble Modern and conductor Peter Eötvös. Gundega Šmite's *Thorn* clearly demonstrates the readiness of the Latvian Radio Choir to grant our composers complete creative freedom, because it was composed after the Conrescence project in 2010, during which the choir's singers learned overtone and microtone singing, singing in untempered scales and unusual timbres, ornamentation typical of traditional music and similar techniques.

Andris Dzenītis' *Stencil of Time* for cello, guitar and electronics hopefully corresponds the closest with the journal's editors' call for "contemporary classical progressive music or alternative sound art". Mārtiņš Viļums' *Tvyjōraan* brings the listener back into the world of compositions based on the principles of microsonorics, while Kristaps Pētersons' *Beauties* for choir brings to light the composer's ability to smile at himself. This is evidenced not only in the music but also in the composer's words, with Pētersons commenting that "There's a belief that after death, a person lives on in his or her works. So now I've provided some good company for myself".

Composer Gundega Šmite once stated: "For younger composers, the need for a broader audience beyond Latvia's borders is becoming more and more pertinent. Maybe it's a kind of ambition, but this is only natural, considering the wider scope of today's information age, to want to cover as broad a range as possible." And it's true, the music of our 30-somethings can be heard often in international forums (Ultima, Warsaw Autumn, Klangspuren, Time of Music, Musica Viva, Gaida, etc.).

However, our current record-breaker – not only among the 30-somethings but among all Latvian composers – is Ēriks Ešenvalds. His choir music can be heard almost weekly across the world, from Australia to China to Canada. For many years, he sang with the "Latvija" professional choir. Thus, being very familiar with the possibilities of a choir and the laws of targeted musical dramaturgy, he does not shy from direct expressions of emotion in his music. This is well evidenced on the *HIS Voice* CD by *Evening*, Ešenvalds' opus based on a poem by Sara Teasdale.

THANK YOU

While writing the summary for the *Latvian Voice* CD, I wished to say thank you to my colleagues at the Czech Music Information Centre for the opportunity to introduce audiences to the experimental and avantgarde "wing" of Latvian music. With the note that, in order to fly, one needs at least two wings, meaning that I hope they will have the opportunity to get to know – and hear in concerts – music by other Latvian composers as well.



Austrian "CatchPopStringStrong" in Riga, November 2014

I also take this opportunity to say thank you to all of the colleagues we had the pleasure of meeting on the MINSTREL trail! Thank you to our wonderful cooperation partners in Poland, Austria, Croatia, Portugal, Slovakia, Cyprus and, of course, at the Greek Institute for Research on Music and Acoustics, whom we got to know so well during these three years together on our musical journey. And thank you for the many, many concerts, conferences, showcases, films, CDs and other publications as well as our stands at the WOMEX, Classical:NEXT, JazzAhead and Midem music fairs.

The database of European music ensembles and the music industry created as a part of the MINSTREL project serves as a chronicle of the road we have travelled together. Look there for information about wonderful European, including Latvian, music and musicians!

And finally, thank you to our cooperation partners in Latvia: the "Porta" festival (which brought Catch-Pop String-Strong, that spirited Austrian female world-music duo, to Riga) and the Latvian Composers' Union (which "spotted" Poland's TWOgether Duo for Latvia's New Music Days). We did it.



MINSTREL project
www.minstrel.eu



Culture



Egīls Šēfers

A DIFFICULT JUGGLING ACT

In my work as a professional musician I often deal with sound recordings, not only whilst putting together concert programmes but also in simply searching for inspiration. In the last few years my work has frequently been in Scandinavia and more and more often this has led me to Swedish "BIS", Finnish "Ondine" and Danish "Dacapo" recordings. These recording companies pay particular attention to the issue and popularization of their own national music and musicians, sometimes even making this their main priority. As I listened to these recordings I was needled repeatedly by one question – why do we not have our own national recording company in Latvia? One that would enable us to distribute the best and most valuable works in Latvian music to listeners far afield? We have such a rich musical tradition, not a scrap poorer than that of our Scandinavian neighbours...

I felt this lack particularly strongly when I was invited to appraise recordings for the "Orpheus' Ear" programmes broadcast by Latvian Radio 3 "Klasika". In one of these programmes we examined interpretations of one of our national treasures, the opera "Uguns un nakts" [Fire and Night] composed by Jānis Medīņš. The transformation of the epic play by Latvia's foremost poet Rainis into an opera is in itself a story worthy of a separate article. Related by Prof. Oļģerts Grāvītis

during my study years, this story still remains vividly in my memory today. How determined the young composer was in his wish to be the author of the first Latvian opera. How during the First World War, fleeing from the Bolsheviks, he carried the heavy score through the whole of Siberia, ceaselessly continuing his work even in harsh and inhuman conditions. How he travelled by ship from Vladivostok round the whole of Asia to reach London and then in 1920 finally returned to Riga, the city that had then become the capital of a new and independent nation. And lastly how Mediņš went to the Opera with the finished score in his hands and only then discovered that he had been outdone – the honour of being the first Latvian opera had gone to the opera “Baņuta” written by Alfrēds Kalniņš...

In our “Uguns un nakts” programme we compared the various recordings of this opera that were available in the Latvian Radio archives, and I came to a really tragic realisation – none of these historic recordings stored in the Radio archives is available to the general public! Since there are no modern day recordings of this music, there is no way a music lover can become familiar with it. It is not that there are no recordings made in Latvia at all. Concerts are regularly recorded, studio recordings are also made (these were particularly numerous during the Soviet period) and there are several independent recording companies. Today’s choirs and orchestras regularly issue their CD’s and their catalogues are sufficiently extensive. Nevertheless it must be admitted that it is not easy for the music lover, either in Latvia or elsewhere, to obtain an all-round view of Latvian classical and contemporary music. We can only deduce that we lack a purposeful

Egīls Šēfers (in the middle) with the “Carion” musicians





goal-directed mechanism for making the best of Latvia's musical heritage available to listeners all over the world.

However, it is one thing to criticize, but quite another to do something to remedy the situation. Support for my view that Latvia needs a recording company that specializes in the national repertoire came from many but it was Ināra Jakubone, Director of the Latvian Music Information Centre (LMIC), who really transformed my criticism into action. I had already worked with Ināra recording and publishing an album "Ziemeļsaule" [Northern Sun] that presented music for clarinet by Latvian composers. I knew that popularization of Latvian music is the main priority of LMIC, that for promotion purposes some 40 Latvian music recordings had already been issued and that these had been presented at dozens of major international music forums and fairs. Despite the difficult circumstances after the financial crisis, Ināra envisaged the possibility of beginning this ambitious project: the formation of a national recording company. Fully aware of the task's difficulty and risks, nevertheless Latvia's approaching centenary in 2018 provided an excellent stimulus that motivated us to begin work. The project's basic idea and main task was defined as providing opportunities for the international distribution of classical and contemporary music recordings produced in Latvia.

Together we studied the market, searched for partners to work with, visited music fairs and spoke to partners and supporters. We are happy that many responded and particularly pleased that our idea found support among many Latvian musicians. Everyone we talked to agreed to participate in recordings without remuneration – the Latvian Radio Choir, the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, the State Choir Latvija, bass-baritone Egils Siliņš and many others. We understood that selecting the best of Latvian music's rich array is a responsible decision and best left to professionals. We therefore formed a consultative council and the council gave the new recording company a sonorous name "Skani!" [Resound!]. In 2014 the Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia provided the first finance for the issue of new recordings.

Sometimes I'm not sure whether this start capital is a blessing or a curse. I am certainly no stranger to recording procedures if we look at these from a musician's perspective. But now I personally have to deal with all the organizational ups and downs of the production process. In addition to my somewhat hectic musical life in Latvia and also Denmark (with the woodwind quintet "Carion") I now need to cope with all the complexities related to producing an album – from finding finance,

planning and overseeing recording sessions to the production of a master recording... And then also taking care of album texts, design, CD production and distribution, with all sorts of legal nuances, contracts and rights in between... Sometimes I really do feel like a juggler with ten balls in the air.


Yet how gratifying when the first results of this work appear!

A new album "The Fruit of Silence" featuring a selection of contemporary Latvian choral music recorded by the Latvian Radio Choir, last year's Grammy Award winner, will be issued in July. A CD "E(GO)", presenting the music of Andris Dzenītis, has already been published as part of a special composers' series and this will be followed in September by "Sound of Freedom", an album of music by Imants Kalniņš performed by the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra. Recording sessions with our renowned bass-baritone Egils Siliņš will be held in autumn for his album of the most beautiful solo songs written by Latvian classical composers. Autumn will also see the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra recording the music of Latvia's most notable symphonist Jānis Ivanovs and that of Volfgangs Dārziņš. We shall entrust public relations and the promotion of CD's outside Latvia to "Accolade PR" in Germany; they will take care of critiques, reviews and the widest possible international resonance for the new recordings.

There is still much to do and it is often our firm belief and idealism that drives us rather than hard cash. Making beautiful plans for the future without guaranteed finance is certainly challenging. It is also difficult to convince distributors with just an idea, therefore we are particularly pleased with those that have been the first to agree to co-operate.

We are inspired by the prospect of celebrating Latvia's centenary in 2018 not only with a new National Library, Contemporary Art Museum and who knows perhaps even a new acoustic concert hall in Rīga, but also with a considerable number of new, top quality, internationally recognized Latvian music recordings. We envisage listeners all over the world being able to find in various digital forms or recorded music catalogues the best vocal music examples of Dārziņš, Mediņš and Vītols, the orchestral works of Ivanovs, Kalniņš and Skulte, and the chamber music of Vasks, Einfelde, Ešenvalds, Zemzaris, Ratniece and Dzenītis.

Many consider that the golden age of music recordings is behind us and we shall not try to prove the opposite with our work. It is our wish, however, to inform people all over the world about the small but tenacious nation on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Just as tenaciously as Jānis Mediņš, we shall move forward with this recording project and, even if we are not the first to do so, nevertheless we shall rejoice in the possibility of sharing our rich Latvian culture. Because our culture is an integral part of us – without it we would not exist.



Orests Silabriedis

CONDUCTOR ANDRIS POGA AND A SENSE OF SECURITY

The beginning of a conductor's path

The *Konsonanse* chamber orchestra, conducted by a certain Andris Poga born in 1980, appeared on the Latvian concert scene at the beginning of the 21st century. At the time, Poga was an unknown novice in symphony conducting. Interesting, interesting – said observers – what will this ambitious youngster show us?

It was known that Poga was studying trumpet performance and band conducting. A lesser known fact was that Poga was also studying philosophy and was particularly taken by the ideas of Descartes, Kant and Husserl. Nobody knew anything about him as a conductor.

Poga graduated from the symphony conducting class at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music in 2007. While there, he had studied under Viesturs Gailis, the former principal conductor of the Latvian National Opera, and upon graduation Poga immediately became the artistic director and principal conductor of the Professional Symphonic Band *Rīga*. Under Poga's direction, the band broadened its repertoire, improved its quality of playing and in general refined its mission. These were the first attempts to change Latvian attitudes towards brass bands, proving that they are capable of more than just funeral marches and waltzes at old-time dances. Poga's first concert with the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra earned him the Latvian Great Music Award for best debut in 2007.

Victory at the Evgeny Svetlanov Conducting Competition

Poga's path to international recognition began with victory at the 2nd Evgeny Svetlanov Conducting Competition in 2010 in Montpellier. It was at that competition that he met his current agent, Marina Bower, who also organises the conducting competition and is the head of artist management at *Productions Internationales Albert Sarfati* in Paris.

Bower explains: "When I organised the Svetlanov competition for the first time, the most important thing for me was to create a jury that would assess new talent seriously and objectively. It might sound unbelievable, but this is possible. Many people have written to me after the competitions and admitted that the Svetlanov competition is like none other.

"The second year of the competition, 500 people applied to take part. Only 18 were selected, and Poga was among them. We didn't know any of the contestants, so none of them received special treatment. When Poga conducted, Anthony (Tony) Fogg, the artistic administrator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, turned to me and said, 'Look at him – he's your gem.'"

Didier de Cottignies, the artistic director of the Orchestre de Paris, remembers: "I saw Andris Poga for the first time at the Svetlanov competition, and he seemed to stand head and shoulders above the other contestants. Many of them were good, but Poga stood out for his thoroughness, his sense of security and his mastery of conducting. I therefore invited Poga to become an assistant conductor of the Orchestre de Paris under Paavo Järvi, and I was not surprised that, after hearing him, 99% of the orchestra members supported him. I was convinced of his success from the very beginning. Poga is very serious, he works extremely well, and it was a great joy for the musicians every time he conducted the orchestra."

The Sarfati agency

The Svetlanov competition differs from many other competitions in that not only do its organisers award monetary prizes, but they also concern themselves with the artistic fate of its winners. Bower says the competition is like a springboard. For Poga, the competition was the springboard



that enabled him to become an artist represented by the Paris-based *Productions Internationales Albert Sarfati*.

Cathy Sarfati, the executive director of the *Sarfati* agency says: “Andris Poga is a complete discovery for us. After his victory at the Svetlanov competition, he – like other winners of the competition – came under our wing, and we are very happy about that, because in the past four years he’s developed a brilliant career for himself. He’s an exceptionally intelligent, modest and fairly reserved young man who does not get drawn into the whirlwind of success; he keeps a cool mind and has an unbelievable talent and feel for music. We are very proud of him. The things he’s accomplished in four years, it takes others ten or more years to achieve the same things.”

When I asked Poga himself about what determined these first international successes, he answered: “I came to a certain realisation after reading a very short review in *The Boston Globe* after my debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. I had conducted Britten’s *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*, and on the next day a couple of sentences in the review connected with a review I had received in the French press a couple of years ago. Surprisingly, both reviews used almost one and the same words. In English, describing a conductor as *flashy* – as in having a dazzling, flashy manner – can be interpreted as something negative. But in this review, my approach to the orchestra and music was described as *unflashy*, that is, inwardly focussed and unpretentious. I really do always try to achieve the best sound possible and can say with certainty that I do not work in front of a mirror. I simply do not know how to make a spectacle, and so I don’t try to do it.”

Undoubtedly, Poga is not an outwardly flashy type of conductor or one focussed on the audience.

Cottignies explains: “But Poga nevertheless has great charisma, and he creates a great feeling of security. In that sense, he reminds me of a superb Italian conductor whom I liked very much –

Antonino Votto, the assistant of Arturo Toscanini and the teacher of Riccardo Muti. Votto and Poga have similar silhouettes and broad shoulders. Votto might not be widely known, but in the 1940s and 1950s he was one of the greatest maestros at *La Scala*, and the similarity between these two men lies in the fact that they both have always evoked in me an unbelievable sense of security. But Poga also has great and very communicative inner strength. I'm certain he has a big career ahead of him."

Working with the Orchestre de Paris

In autumn 2011, Poga began working as the assistant to the Orchestre de Paris' principal conductor, Paavo Järvi, and a year later he was hired as the assistant conductor for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. I asked him whether, having arrived at the Paris and Boston orchestras, he felt he had become a player in some bigger league:

"Of course, the feeling is completely different. The beginning of my career was not at all as I had imagined it after winning the Montpellier competition and seeing how the careers of other conductors were advancing. Quite a few French orchestras invited me to guest-conduct – some even several times – and I began thinking, yes, this is an interesting and fun life, travelling here and there, conducting this and that. But then Marina [Bower] and I began talking about how that was all well and good, but such a lifestyle didn't promote any kind of development. The idea came up about trying to talk with Paavo Järvi about possibly taking me on as an assistant conductor. In recent years Järvi's Orchestre de Paris has gotten along quite well without an assistant; the practice is associated more with American orchestras, which almost always have one or two assistant conductors. They've had that system there for at least a hundred years, and many famous conductors have begun their career as an assistant conductor. Take, for example, Leonard Bernstein or my predecessor at this job in Boston, Michael Tilson Thomas.

"There was a practice at the Orchestre de Paris in which an educational concert took place on the day after an evening concert, and this concert was conducted by the same conductor as the evening concert. Järvi said he wouldn't do it, because the workload was too great; with a new programme every week, he didn't have the time or the energy. In addition, by inviting assistants they would be giving educational opportunities to new conductors. And so it came about that I was one of the candidates. The choice of assistant was basically left to a vote in the orchestra."

As an artistic entity, the Orchestre de Paris has a strong personality – no one can deny that. What is it about the way this ensemble makes music that fascinates Poga the most?

He says: "It's the spontaneity. If they embrace an idea, they implement it to the very core. I had the opportunity to hear them play Brahms – you just sit there in the audience and realise that you've never even heard something like the Berlin Philharmonic play like that – there's such passion in it! But, just the same, if they don't like a conductor or soloist, they become completely cool and distanced."

After the *Radio Classique* Christmas concert at the end of 2014, in which Poga conducted the Orchestre de Paris, I met first violinist Roland Daugareil, who said: "Our orchestra has always unanimously held Poga in high esteem, and we are very happy for the cooperation we enjoyed with him. This is our last concert of the year and also the Orchestre de Paris' last concert ever in the Pleyel Hall, so this concert under the direction of Poga will leave us with even more beautiful memories. He is very kind and very sensible, very professional, and we've always worked together well. In the professional sense, he really has genuine talent, and now he just has to gradually, step by step, gain experience, acquire experience. In short, he now needs to mature like a fine wine."

Extremes

On December 11 and 12, 2013, Poga replaced 34-year-old Finnish conductor Mikko Franck, who had suddenly fallen ill, conducting Shostakovich's 7th Symphony in two Orchestre de Paris concerts in the Pleyel Hall. It was a dizzying experience, jumping into another conductor's territory on short notice and practically without rehearsals conducting a major symphonic work that he had never conducted before.

Remy Louis, the popular French classical music critic on *Diapason* magazine's Internet portal, writes: "With the build of a rugby forward, captivating and crystal clear gestures and a naturally instantaneous authority. [...] The beginning of the *Allegretto* is cautious, but as the famous march theme takes off, his interpretation of the symphony takes on its true character and continues to the end with a great concentration and stylistic refinement that reminds the listener of Gennady Rozhdestvensky's interpretations. [...] Without visible effort, Poga made this symphony completely his own, offering a grand interpretation of the "Leningrad Symphony" – the first in his budding career! For this, we say thank you to Poga, just as the audience at Pleyel Hall heartily expressed its appreciation. Make note of this name: Andris Poga. This will not be the last surprise we see from him."

Christian Merlin, the prominent musicologist and music critic at *Le Figaro*, writes: "Seeing as Mikko Franck had conducted all of the rehearsals, Poga could have just stepped in as coordinator of the performance, merely directing traffic and letting the orchestra play the Finnish conductor's interpretation. But he did not decline the position of interpreter and source of inspiration. Poga held the great arc of this tricky and easily tractile opus firmly in his hands and gave it unceasing energy. One could detract from Poga's merits by saying that he rode to success on the fruits of Franck's labour, but another conductor would not have been able to manage these elements as well and therefore would not have allowed the amazingly concentrated and enthusiastic Orchestre de Paris to demonstrate its full glory and fine musicianship."

Marina Bower remembers: "That was an extremely important turning point for Poga in his career. All of the critics immediately said that Poga is one of the most superb new conductors – no, not just one of the best new conductors, but overall one of the best conductors of our time. Music critics tend to criticise. But none of the most prestigious publications have yet pounced on Poga. He's also doing well in Boston. There he was given a whole concert programme not as an assistant, but as a true conductor."

Like the occasion with Franck and Shostakovich, Poga had a similar experience in September 2013, when he substituted for the then 89-year-old maestro Georges Prêtre and very successfully conducted Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony, delighting both the audience and the critics with his interpretation.

Visiting in Boston

Before Andris Nelsons became the artistic director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the orchestra's assistant conductor was Andris Poga. For a time, many music lovers confused which of the two Latvian Andris' were on the podium at which time. The fact that both had begun their musical careers as trumpet players led to no greater clarity.

Poga says: "The quality of American orchestras is still very high, and their work ethic and attitude differs greatly from the style of European orchestras. In Europe, especially in Paris, if the orchestra sees that something isn't quite going the way you had planned, the players sort of distance themselves from you and take the initiative into their own hands; they play on their own and don't pay much attention to the conductor anymore. Once something like that has happened, it's very

difficult to get the orchestra's trust back. It's different in America – even if you happen to make an incorrect gesture, the orchestra will still look at you the next time and will play what you show them to play.

I think Americans have completely different criteria for professionalism in music – in reviews and radio programmes as well. It's a completely different world, in which everything is examined and described more in terms of quality and visuality instead of content."

A story about the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra

Lorin Maazel died in the summer of 2014. Suddenly, the question arose of who would take his Munich Philharmonic Orchestra on their planned tour of Asia.

Marina Bower says: "This tour was organised by the *Kajimoto* agency, one of the world's oldest and most significant agencies, which is particularly important in Asia. You can imagine the number of people who applied for the position! And again, purely by coincidence, the woman organising the Munich Philharmonic's Asian tour happened to see Poga conducting the Shostakovich symphony. She saw him and decided to give it a try. Yes, exactly that – give it a try. I don't know how she persuaded the Munich Philharmonic, but persuade them she did. During the tour, the orchestra and Poga achieved complete harmony. And after the tour, they've kept inviting him to conduct again."

Didier de Cottignies also played a role in the process: "When the Munich Philharmonic was considering Poga for the tour, they asked me for my opinion, and I could say with certainty that Poga is a suitable substitute for Lorin Maazel. Furthermore, Poga is one of the most honest people that I know. He always clearly knows whether such and such can be achieved or not. If Poga says it's not possible, then it truly is not possible. You can believe it. I completely trust him in this sense. Many young conductors will assert that they can and will then spend the whole night studying just so they can conduct something they've always wanted to conduct. But Poga is not like that – he's honest, strict and direct."

Two of Munich's newspapers reviewed the grand harmony between the Munich Philharmonic players and Andris Poga.

On October 20, 2014, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote: "The seemingly inconspicuous Latvian conductor Andris Poga was able to entice vividly beautiful, intelligent and consistently refined interpretations from the orchestra. By the end of the tour, in Taipei, he had gained the admiration of the orchestra to such a degree that he received an ovation from them after their final rehearsal. [...] In this sense, things were not easy for the young Latvian, especially because his venerable colleagues (the recently deceased Maazel and Gergiev, for whom Poga had substituted) are considered legends. But Poga is a calm and structured young man. He trusts his cool mind. His conducting is not emotional, but it is clearly structured.

Marina Bower concludes: "The Asian tour gave new momentum to Poga's engagements, among which are assignments for which others wait for years and still fail to achieve. For example, the Gewandhaus in Leipzig – every conductor's dream. Poga has a concert planned there next season. The NDR Symphony Orchestra in Hamburg has invited him to conduct. The Bavarian Radio has proposed recording him with the Bamberg Symphony. Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Rome's Saint Cecilia Academy Orchestra, the Luxembourg Philharmonic and London's Philharmonia Orchestra have also expressed interest in Poga. In other words, many of the top orchestras have expressed so much interest that Poga's calendar for 2015 and even 2016 is already full. Just a few days ago the Orchestre National de France asked me to reserve a date, but none were left. So, 2017 will soon be full as well.

"I've been doing this job for 30 years already. I've had the pleasure to represent Evgeny Svetlanov, Yuri Temirkanov, Valery Gergiev and many Western musicians, but I must admit that there are fewer and fewer musicians of their calibre. But Poga is going in the same direction as the great maestros I just mentioned. I congratulate Latvia for being the birthplace of such talent! Poga is intelligent and modest. For him, the music – instead of his career – is always in first place."

Andris Poga – artistic director of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra

In late autumn of 2013, Poga became the artistic director and principal conductor of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra (LNSO).

Poga says: "The stimulus to take on this job was, quite simply, the challenge of becoming the artistic leader of the nation's top orchestra, with all of the creative opportunities the position entails. It's one thing to be a guest conductor with good or excellent orchestras with long traditions and unique sounds that you can't influence much, but it's a completely different thing to take on the responsibility for retaining and developing an orchestra's sound in the long term. Therefore, the LNSO musicians' trust and support is very important to me, and I cannot allow myself to betray them.

"The most enjoyable thing in this job is the opportunity to plan and develop the general overview of the repertoire for an orchestra's season, choosing new works and first performances of new compositions as well as seeing to what extent my vision for the orchestra's ideal sound is realised in real life.

"The least enjoyable thing is the fact that, considering Latvia's financial situation, the musicians receive inadequately low salaries. For this reason, the artistic targets and demands are often in stark contrast with the musicians' daily lives (including the necessity to work two or three jobs).

"My work is also made more difficult by the fact that Riga does not have a concert hall that corresponds to today's acoustic needs. While everyone enjoys the good concerts and acoustics at the Cēsis and Rēzekne concert halls, more and more often at concerts in Riga's Great Guild Hall we must put up with the fact that 'we are where we are...'"

In reviewing Latvia's cultural policy, Poga says: "This seems to me quite an abstract situation. One feels a lack of finances at all levels of the orchestra's daily life, from musicians' salaries to the acquisition of musical instruments to concerts – it's very difficult to attract prominent soloists from abroad, and especially distinguished guest conductors, which is vitally important for the growth of any orchestra's musicianship.

"Currently, however, we're nevertheless able to implement most of our artistic goals, even though we often teeter on the edge of financial risk."

The conductor – the person

Andris Poga is a fairly reserved man. He does not like to boast or talk about himself. He hates being photographed and other forms of showing off. In conversation, however, it's quite easy to bring Poga to unexpected bouts of laughter or ping-pong games of ironic remarks. In small groups of people the maestro seems to enjoy conversations as a form of intellectual challenge, although he is very reserved when it comes to public speaking. Rattling off strings of beautiful words is not Poga's forté. He will rather say nothing if the words are merely beautiful but lack content; instead, he is more likely to say something short and dry, but precise.



By observing the way in which Poga plans dates and events during a season, one can see that he does have a bit of the gambler in him...except that in place of playing cards, he deals in the orchestra and works of music. His temperament shows itself in his impulsive reactions, especially when disclaiming and arguing. Poga enjoys it. Steadiness and bolts of temper alternate in his character like a strobe light. He doesn't say anything about himself, and then suddenly he recounts an episode from the past – oh, that time in Peru when we got into such and such a situation with a rented car. Or, how we did this or that in Indonesia. It seems that travel is Poga's second passion after music. It's obvious that Japan is one of his favourite destinations. And not just because of the cuisine.

"I just feel a good atmosphere in Japan," says Poga. "I'm the sort of conductor who tends to offer instead of order, and I think that fits well with the Japanese mentality. The Japanese wait to be invited to play instead of for someone to order them to play. One more positive thing – wherever there's a good orchestra [in Japan], there's a good concert hall."

Music, travel. What else feeds Poga's spiritual horizons? "I'm interested in the world as such, but I do not have a specific hobby or pastime. Yes, I like films, but mostly only on longer flights. In the past few years, the volume of music in my life has been simply insane. If people could see how my cabinet of music has grown over the past two years – it's just scores, scores and more musical scores."

And where is Poga's music cabinet located?

"At home, in Riga. I think it'll stay there, too, because I feel at my best in Riga. In that sense, I'm a patriot."

Inese Lūsiņa

SEE HOW DIFFERENT WE ARE!

The Osokins dynasty of pianists

This summer, for the first time, all three pianists from the Osokins family gathered together on one stage – distinguished professor and performer Sergejs Osokins and his talented sons, Andrejs and Georgijs, both of whom have won international competitions and are internationally recognised concert performers. This past winter, after winning the international Frederic Chopin competition in China, 18-year-old Georgijs surprised an audience back in Latvia with his first solo concert at the Riga Great Guild. His debut album will be released this autumn, and before that he will appear in Germany, France, Italy and Poland. His older brother Andrejs has also had a successful year this year, winning the prestigious International Pianism Forum audience award in Frankfurt, also becoming the first musician from Latvia since the restoration of the country's independence to take part in the famous Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. The father of the two young musicians, Sergejs Osokins, is a past recipient of the Latvian Great Music Award, and among his major projects in recent times has been a partnership with the Radio Latvia Choir, concerts and master's classes in Scandinavia, and work at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music, where he continues to train young pianists.



Andrejs Osokins: This was the first time that we appeared together, even though we had been thinking about it for some time.

Q: Is a family ensemble advantageous in that you very easily understand one another?

A.O.: I think that the most difficult, yet also most interesting thing is to preserve our individuality, because we play the piano differently and are different people. Given that, the most interesting and difficult challenge is to establish a whole organism of three pianos without losing individuality.

Georgijs Osokins: The three of us played Johann Sebastian Bach's concerto *After Vivaldi*, which Bach transposed for four harpsichords and a chamber orchestra. I arranged it for three pianos and an orchestra.

Q: You also were brilliant as individuals at the concert, playing Tchaikovsky's monumental *First Piano Concerto* and Chopin's lyrical *First Piano Concerto*.

A.O.: I played Tchaikovsky's *concerto* and Georgijs played Chopin's *Concerto*. I hope that it was interesting to compare two brothers, two different composers, and two different instruments – a Steinway piano and a Yamaha piano. My brother prefers the Yamaha piano, and it was brought from Germany specifically for this concert.

Q: Georgijs also played his first solo concert on a piano brought to Latvia for that purpose, allowing us to enjoy the sound of a Fazioli instrument from Italy.

G.O.: I try out various pianos.

Q: I believe you are also the only one to bring a special piano bench with you.

G.O.: Yes, that is my bench. Now you see how different we are.

Q: I will ask the father how he deals with these differences as a pedagogue. Were you always certain that they would be successful?

Sergejs Osokins: I don't think that any pedagogue can be certain about that, particularly at first. Each musician develops in a very different way, and it is impossible to say that this one will be an artist, and this one will not. That is just not possible. It takes a long time for an artist to emerge. Many children at music schools play the instrument the best at age 11 or 12, and no one knows what will happen then. There are young pianists, who reach their heights at the age of 16. Our goal is different – to ensure growth for as long as possible and to the highest possible level.

Q: I have noticed that musicians, even those who are the best teachers, prefer to entrust their children to other teachers. Surely a student will not tell a stranger that he doesn't want to play the music, he's tired of it, he won't play it.

A.O.: You're right. Ours was a unique case in that my father taught me from childhood, even when I was in the preparatory class of the Emīls Dārziņš School of Music. That is unusual. I think it is a great psychological achievement for my father that we have never had any major quarrels. Lessons were a very normal part of how we grew up. He never told me that I must be a virtuoso, that I must rehearse for 12 hours a day, or that it would be a bad thing if I did not learn the scales. We had simple conversations during which I learned my weaknesses and necessary areas of improvement. It was my own motivation to rehearse more and to learn a new repertoire. I can talk about my father's pedagogic method. It is very closely linked to the mind of the student and not just to the development of finger techniques. My father encourages and accepts any original approach to an opus. There are many professors whose students play the same style, repeating their teacher's views about a specific sonata or concert. The situation with my father is exactly the opposite,

because he always looks for new sounds, helping students to do the same, and that allows both of them to discover the composition anew. That is why my brother and I developed very differently in terms of aesthetics, repertoires and our approach to playing the piano. Even if my father plays the composition, we can start with a blank sheet of paper, as opposed to someone saying that this measure should be played in this way or that. That's something that teachers often do.

Q: Andrejs, how did you feel in master's classes and studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where you were taught by different professors? Was it worth it?

A.O.: Absolutely. My father was the initiator of the process, because at the age of 19 I did not want to study anywhere else. That was the only time that he put a bit of pressure on me and said that I must change my environment and thinking and learn from other teachers. I think that a musician gains something else from each teacher and every major concert, thus helping to shape his own style, just like a bee gathers nectar from many different flowers and then produces honey. That's what happened with me. I studied in England and also took part in master's classes taught by Russian teachers to merge both schools.

Q: Georgijs, you decided to attend Julliard in New York?

G.O.: Yes, this September, and I hope that my teacher will be Sergei Babayan, who only teaches eight people now in his class. I have met and worked with him, and I think that we will be able to find common ground. I visited him last winter, and we met in Italy this summer. The school of pianism is interesting, and I think that it is right that in our family we are eager to learn about different schools. Globalisation has led to a situation in which there is no "pure" Russian school, German school of French school of pianism. Today you have to take elements from all of them and create something that is your own.

Q: What can you tell us about everyday life? Is it not too much to always be together and to communicate in a narrow circle of people?

G.O.: It is very advantageous for my brother and me that our father is our pedagogue. We can talk to him at any moment about music, art, life, anything at all. Artists very much need to know and think not just about music, but about everything. Having our father as an advisor is a great advantage. I would not say that we spend too much time together. My brother lives in London, my schedule of foreign appearances is quite active, and I will soon move to another continent. My father, in turn, always has a lot of work to do.

A.O.: I would add that it would be an illusion to imagine that we spend every evening at home talking about classical music and nothing else. That happens seldom, though sometimes it is valuable after a lesson to talk a bit not about the details, but about the main aspects of composers or musical eras. That stimulates one's imagination.

Q: Are we seeing an era of great pianists and great musical ideals today, or is that a thing from the past?

S.O.: That depends on you and how you view that matter. If you think that everyone is average, then that is your desire. I think that the era is still here, and we hope that what we are doing could also be art. Everyone plays the piano, but what are you actually doing? Do you want to put together something real – perhaps something that is small, but artistically valuable and true?

Q: Are there major guideposts today such as Vladimir Horowitz and Glenn Gould in the past?

S.O.: Grigory Sokolov, and not only him. Arcadi Volodos. Martha Argerich. Mikhail Pletnev.

Q: Why?

S.O.: Why is a genius a genius? It's because he's a genius. That is brilliant art at a very, very high level.

G.O.: It is art that will remain with us for a very long time.

Q: Why did you encourage your sons to play the piano in specific, as opposed to some other instrument?

S.O.: Because pianism is a mental disease in our family. We love it. We love the sound of the piano and piano music. My wife is also a pianist.

Q: Do you want this “disease” to be transferred to future generations? I can imagine the surreal scene of a group of Osokins pianists from four different generations.

S.O.: It is not the case that from the very beginning I would tell a child who is interested in music that he must play the piano. The child has to understand that he wants to do so. It was a process, and at one moment it became clear that Andrejs can try his hand at it. The same was true of Georgijs. At the Dārziņš School, he first studied with Ilze Treija for two years, and then we began to work together. That does not mean that I wanted to turn both of them into pianists. At the same time, though, I wanted both of them to play the piano. As I said, it’s a disease.

Q: At the Music Academy, do the Osokins speak differently than at home? At school did you say “please, teacher” to your father?

A.O.: I remember that our attitude and behaviour were different at school, and we had more respect and discipline. We were not allowed to be late for a class that my father taught.

Q: What happened if you did?

A.O.: Very harsh criticism, as was the case with any other student.

G.O.: We had to set an example for others, and we had to observe discipline.

Q: Professor, how many students do you have now?

S.O.: There will be seven this year, plus one student at the Dārziņš School. Georgijs, who has completed one year of studies at the Latvian Music Academy is “only one-half” on the list, because of the studies in America.

Q: Do you have any common interests or hobbies outside of music?

A.O.: My brother and I both play tennis, but my hobby is travelling. That is inevitable for musicians, because it relates to our profession, but I enjoy it. I like arriving in new cities and meeting new people and new languages. That is nice.

G.O.: My hobby is more related to composition. I am composing music for a silent short film about New York that is being produced in America. The music will express the contrasts and emotions of the city. I establish my own vocal and orchestral arrangements and transcriptions for my concerts. In Naples, I performed a transcription of Ādolfs Skulte’s *Arieta*, which is a very simple but beautiful miniature that is often learned by children. I remember playing it at age seven, and now I have produced my own version with variations and a rich texture. It’s interesting for me to work in this direction, and I have a few other ideas.

Q: Andrejs, do you regret that at the prestigious Peter Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow this summer you were not among the leaders?

A.O.: Perhaps, but I have taken part in so many competitions that during the past five years I have travelled there only to get a good attitude from the jury and perhaps some concert offers. Competitions are another academic level, another level to motivate myself, work, perform at a very

good level and overcome my nervousness. My best impression this year was from a competition in Frankfurt, where I won the audience sympathy prize and offers to perform in Germany and France. Sometimes a smaller competition is more useful than one that is organised with a lot of paths. In April Georgijs took part in the qualification round for the Chopin competition that will be held in October in Warsaw, and a few weeks later I received a letter from Japan in which I was asked for contact information about my brother so that he could be invited to perform together with an orchestra in Japan.

G.O.: I'm not happy about the fact that I have to take part in competitions, but there is no other option. Competition is like a sport, and it has nothing to do with art. I believe that competition in the world of art is very problematic. It is even difficult for me to listen to colleagues, because I instinctively sense competition. It develops an athlete, not an artist. Still, there will be competitions. I got through the first round, and in October I will compete in the Frederic Chopin Competition in Warsaw. I believe that I will be the first pianist from Latvia to do so. My brother was the first one to enter the Tchaikovsky Competition since the restoration of Latvia's independence.

Q: Andrejs, are you planning to plant roots in London and become a British citizen?

A.O.: Because I travel so much, I spent as much time in London as in Rīga last year. This year I have spent a bit more time in Rīga. Friends say that if I'm at home only three months a year, then it doesn't really matter where the home is. Thanks to the new technologies that lots of people criticise, I can communicate with anyone from any part of the world and talk to those who are close to me. That really helps the artist who travels a lot. I don't think, though, that living in Rīga would be bad for my career. On the contrary, I think that perhaps I should not leave and burn all my bridges.

G.O.: I don't want to leave at all, because I love my country and my home, but from the career perspective, alas, I have to be where there is a cultural centre. I will walk out from the doors of the university, and right there will be the Metropolitan Opera, where Latvians sing, as well as the Lincoln Centre, the Avery Fischer Centre, Carnegie Hall – all the places where outstanding soloists perform. Still, I don't want to leave. I feel best here at home.

Q: How important to you is the support of understanding friends?

G.O.: I hate crowds. I don't like regular contacts with friends or anyone else. Of value to us as artists is the ability to take an abstract look at life and society from the sidelines. That's where we find story lines, as if from a distance. My life method is to talk to myself.

A.O.: That's absolutely not true for me. I love to gain inspiration from people and conversations. Each person with his characteristics and worldview can become a character and hero in my interpretations and my musical world. When I spend a long time alone with the piano, I see that I have nothing to say to the instrument. I need inspiration from other people.

S.O.: From very few people, just a few, but at the same time, from everyone and everything, from books and nature.

Q: What has been the most difficult thing about raising your children?

S.O.: Basically I'm lazy. I like to work when I am interested in what I am doing. It's always been interesting with them. There was never a moment when I wanted to bang my head against a wall and say "That's all."

Q: Do you think the musicians lose their childhood?



From the left: Georgijs, Andrejs and Sergejs Osokins

G.O.: On the contrary, I had a saturated childhood, because we were always in the world of art, which is much more interesting than playing football with my friends. I used to play football, too, but that changed when I was a teenager.

S.O.: There are a great many children, not just in the world of music, who want to work, not play.

Q: Your decision to perform together was a one-off experiment or the beginning of a new tradition?

A.O.: It would be great if there were a continuation.

G.O.: That depends on the audience, because we artists, after all, are bound by public interest. After all.

Q: Why do you say after all, and twice?

G.O.: Because my personal goal is not always to perform before an audience. I do not always have to bow before the desires and tastes of the audience. It is dangerous if a brilliant musician has a good sense of what audiences like and begins to adapt to that. If the goal is to get the audience to like you, then that destroys everything, and art is gone. It is important for me to abstract myself from this issue. To be honest, when I play for many people, I forget all about them. I imagine myself playing in a room, perhaps with someone in the distance hearing my music, because the door is ajar.

Q: So you play for yourself?

G.O.: Yes.

S.O.: I feel the audience internally and how it breathes. Perhaps that is just a matter of illusion or imagination, but I do have that illusion, and I have a dialogue with the audience.



A.O.: During concert performances, I have energy that comes from above, from space, not from me. It passes through me and enters the audiences. Afterward people can formulate their emotions in one way or another, but the main thing for me is that I really believe that people who attend concerts change, perhaps only while they are in the auditorium, but nevertheless. That allows me to hope that music will influence their lives. Perhaps that is an idealistic goal, but I always feel that the audience is there and that the audience wants to listen to my music.

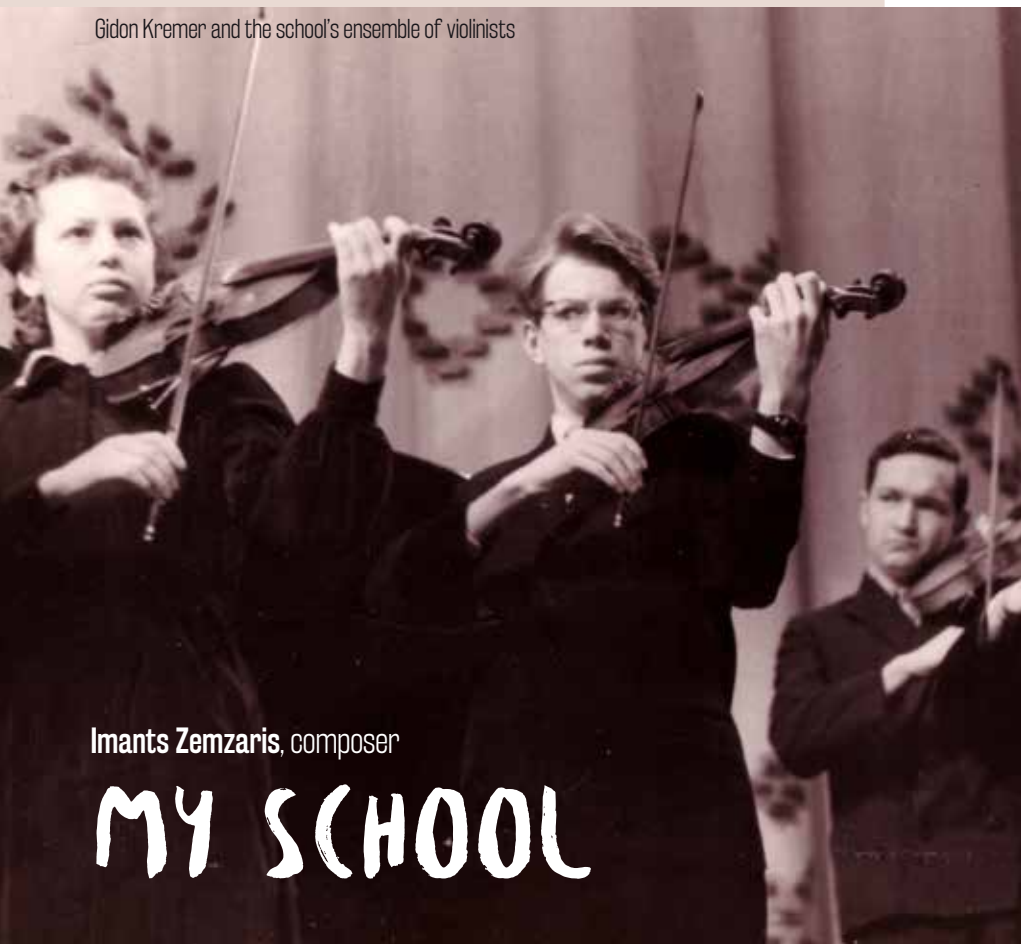
Q: Finally, what did you think when you heard the words “dynasty of musicians”?

A.O.: When people talk about dynasties of musicians, I always think about the Bach dynasty. The main thing is that many Bach opuses are exercises for children. It is didactic music, but it is so beautiful and deep from the perspective of spirituality. I am fascinated about how much he loved his children and what a great pedagogue he was in composing music that allowed children to develop their performance technique. These opuses are masterpieces, and people today are amazed by them. I believe that the experience that people hand down to others in terms of art can be shown and taught only with your own example or hands.

G.O.: It's like a family restaurant, which has recipes that are kept by the family. I think that there are things about us about which no one else knows, things that only we feel. Famous in the world of pianism is the legendary Neuhaus dynasty, and there are many examples of such dynasties in the world of which we are not aware. The family has to have a father who is a musician, and that is usually the case for great musicians. Nothing appears from nothing.

S.O.: None of that was expected or planned, but if that happened, then that is great.

Gidon Kremer and the school's ensemble of violinists



Imants Zemzaris, composer

MY SCHOOL

I am sure that people who remember the Emīls Dārziņš High School of Music with love and gratitude today include the violinists Gidon Kremer and Baiba Skride, the cellists Mischa Maisky and Marta Sudraba, the pianists Raimonds Pauls and Vestards Šimkus, the conductors Mariss Jansons and Andris Nelsons, as well as the composers Pēteris Plakidis, Pēteris Vasks and Georgs Pelēcis. The school provides a serious and thorough education that has allowed many of its graduates to become part of the most outstanding chamber ensembles and orchestras in Europe and America. The school's alumni are the numerical and qualitative nucleus of Latvia's main professional ensembles – the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Latvian National Opera, the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, and *Sinfonietta Rīga*. Many of the graduates are also instructors at the Latvian Academy of Music and various schools of music, as well as editors and producers in music-related mass media outlets. The alumni of the Dārziņš School are seen and felt everywhere.

The Emīls Dārziņš High School of Music was established in 1945 on the basis of the educational model used in the Soviet Union at that time (in Moscow, Leningrad and elsewhere). The school is for particularly talented children who, over the course of 12 years, are purposefully trained so that they can enter the Latvian Academy of Music. Education at the school is free of charge, which was something new when the school was established. Before and during World War II, there were only private schools of music in Riga, and they cost a lot of money. Students in the upper grades of the high school now receive small stipends.

The matriarch and founder of the Emīls Dārziņš High School of Music was the pianist and educator Dora Brauna, who was a graduate of the St Petersburg Conservatory and the mother of the pianist Hermanis Brauns and the musicologist Joahims Brauns.

At first the school had no facilities of its own, and classes were taught at the Academy of Music and even in the flats of the teachers. Early in 1945 there was only a piano class taught by Dora Brauna along with the legendary educator, Professor Valērijs Zosts, the pianist and composer Arvīds Žilinskis, and a few others. Later that year, a string instrument class was established by the prominent violinist Karl Brückner (grandfather of Gidon Kremer) and the cellist Ēvalds Berzinskis.

The Emīls Dārziņš High School of Music had 156 students in 1946 and 196 at the beginning of 1947. Soon there were also classes for wind and percussion instruments.

The school obtained its own building at Raiņa Boulevard 23 in 1948. An old rental building that was right alongside the Latvian Academy of Music was adapted for its purposes. For the first time, the school taught general topics in addition to musical ones. Languages, history, natural sciences, maths, physics and chemistry were all taught. In 1949, students from the Riga High School of Choreography joined the school, though the building was rather small. Lessons were taught in two shifts -- general topics in the morning and music in the afternoon.

In 1950, the Dārziņš school had its own symphony orchestra. Choir singing was mandatory, and the Emīls Dārziņš High School of Music Boys' Choir quickly gained international fame and recognition.

During future decades, the symphony orchestra became a respected ensemble, and it usually performed in the heart of Old Riga at the Great Guild. The abilities of the orchestra can be understood if one just looks at some of the opuses that it performed – Dvořák's *Ninth Symphony*, Rachmaninov's *Second Piano Concerto*, etc. The orchestra also provided music for several full-length ballet performances.

The tours of the boys' choir eventually became so extensive that it was hard to ensure that the youngsters also got an education. In 1994, the choir became the nucleus for the Riga Cathedral Choir School.

A big event in 1955 was the participation of the Dārziņš school at a presentation of Latvian art and literature in Moscow. The orchestra performed the first movement from Edmund Angerer's *Children's Symphony*, with the best of the best students playing solos and students from the school's ballet class dancing.

During the 1960s, graduates from the Dārziņš school studied at the conservatories of Moscow and Leningrad and began to achieve international recognition. The cellist Māris Villerušs, who was taught by Mstislav Rostropovich himself, won diplomas at Tchaikovsky and Casals competitions. In 1964, pianist Ilze Graubiņa won the Bach Competition in Leipzig. In 1965, Philippe Hirschhorn took second place in the Paganini Competition in Genoa, but two years later he won the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. Gidon Kremer won third place at the same competition. Queen Elisabeth smiled to the two young performers (both of them once students of Professor Voldemārs Stūrešs at the Dārziņš school).



Mikhail Baryshnikov and the director Ieva Arāja

The students of the school won their first victories at Concertino Praha competitions, with Radio Latvia helping each participant to be represented with a recording of his or her performance.

In 1971, the school began to move to a new building at Kalnciema Street 10/12, on the opposite bank of the Daugava River. In truth, this is a modern complex of buildings -- a five-floor building for music, another for general educational topics, a separate concert and ballet hall, a separate sports hall, and a separate building for the ballet school. Construction of dormitories for the school was completed a few years later. This was a clear benefit for musical life, because musically gifted children from Latvia's regions could now attend the school, as well. The dormitories were large enough to allow parents to stay with their children.

Classes at the Dārziņš school numbered around 15 students, or less than one-half of class numbers at other high schools in Rīga. These "chamber style" classes allowed teachers to have a more differentiated and individualised attitude toward each student, and that was very much necessary at a school such as the Dārziņš school.

From the very beginning, the Dārziņš school taught classes both in Latvian and in Russian, but there were never any ethnic conflicts of the type that sometimes happened at other "mixed" schools. The students at the Dārziņš school easily learned both languages by performing and studying together. I suppose that the families of musically gifted children are also of great importance. Love of music and a yearning for culture and education can stand above petty and everyday quarrels that are sometimes specifically provoked by people in certain circles.

Once Latvia regained its independence in 1991, the door was open to the whole world, and successes among Dārziņš school students at international competitions became regular and self-evident. For the teachers, the achievements were confirmation of professional skills.

Over the course of 12 years, the students at the Dārziņš school gain a targeted and sequential education that allows them to learn a very broad and universal repertoire. Invaluable are skills learned by taking part in chamber ensembles, as accompanists (for pianists) and members of the



The school's Symphony orchestra and conductor Andris Vecumnieks

“Rome will never turn anyone into an artist who has not been born an artist. The best and deepest things that exist in any artist cannot be purchased in Rome or anywhere else.”

Emīls Dārziņš

orchestra. Students also learn a great deal about music theory. Graduates are fully ready to enter music universities in Latvia or abroad.

Music, of course, is the main thing for the students at the Dārziņš school, and everything else is secondary. Still, students have every chance to prove themselves in other areas. Those who enjoy maths, chemistry or foreign languages can take part in student Olympiads at the level of Riga or Latvia. Data show that Dārziņš school ranks among the best high schools in the capital city and the country.

Every spring, the Emīls Dārziņš High School of Music presents so-called New Composition Concerts, with students performing their own compositions. Composition is an elective at the school, but quite a few students take the classes. Sometimes the New Composition concerts last for three hours. Composition is taught at the school by Pēteris Vasks, Marina Gribinčika and Imants Zemzaris.

There are also students who organise exhibitions of drawings or paintings, because the large and light vestibule of the school is perfect for such shows.

Some classes have very active teams of intellectuals. Some students put their heads together and come up with the idea of publishing a school newsletter. Then an A4-format newsletter on four pages can be bought for a few euro cents from the school's administration office.

The Emīls Dārziņš High School of Music has 312 students and 157 teachers and other employees, and this year it is celebrating the 70th anniversary of its establishment. Each department (piano, string, wind instruments) has presented a concert at the Latvian Academy of Music. The jubilee concert of the symphony orchestra was held at the Great Guild, which is home to the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra (a symbolic testament to the continuation of generations and traditions of music).

This year the school is also celebrating the 140th anniversary of the birth of its patron, the great Latvian composer Emīls Dārziņš. His work, thoughts and passionate spirit always set an example for every young musician, even those moments of bemusement when high ranking and pure ideals of art are suppressed by the noisy projectors of careers, advertising and false values.

Ilze Šarkovska-Liepīņa

LOOKING FOR A HOME FOR MUSIC

The "Great Amber", Liepāja



The "Gors", Rēzekne



Latvia has some two million residents, among whom nearly one-half live in the capital city of Rīga. This metropolis of Latvian music is home to the Latvian National Opera and the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra. Also in Rīga is the Latvian Academy of Music, and the city is always full of intensive musical activities. Rīga has many concert halls, including the Arena Rīga (the largest multifunctional arena in the Baltic States, with more than 10,500 seats) and the Great or Song Festival open-air stage at Mežaparks (space for 10,000 singers and 15,000 listeners). Also in Rīga are acoustic concert halls in the city centre and in various neighbourhoods. Musicians are forever trying to use sound to bring back life to forgotten, recently renovated or very new concert venues.

During the summer music literally breaks into live and flowering nature, with audiences sitting among wonderfully beautiful corners of Latvia that sink under greenery and are full of fresh air. Whether these are large or small castles, museums and cultural centres or the “Nature Concert Hall” that each year finds room under the open skies in a forest, by the sea, or at abandoned farms.

Rīga is by no means the only place for good music. Though the process of urbanisation continues to bring people to larger cities, which empties out the countryside, regional centres in Latvia try to gain new life thanks to economic and cultural investments, particularly in terms of the development of infrastructure and the establishment of a new network of concert locations and halls.

During the last five years, new acoustic and regional concert halls were built in Latvia’s historical regions – Kurzeme (Western Latvia), Vidzeme (Northern Latvia) and Latgale (Eastern Latvia), largely thanks to co-financing from the European Fund for Regional Development.

The first hall to be opened was the “Latgale Embassy,” which is also known as the Eastern Latvian concert hall GORS (the word for “spirit” in the Latgalian language). It was opened in Rēzekne in May 2013 and is the first brand new concert hall in Latvia. Design work began in 2008, with the Latvian architects Daiga Bikše and Uldis Balodis producing the blueprints for the hall. The building is based on Scandinavian design, emphasising its practicality, functionality, laconism and respect for the surrounding environment – the Rēzekne River Valley and the surrounding terrain of hillocks. The building resembles a kiln for clay, reminding us of the typically creative and business-like thinking of Latgalians. The flames, red design elements and dynamic forms of the building symbolise a creative spirit. The two acoustic auditoria in the building seat 1,000 people (or 3,000 standing people) in the Large Auditorium and 220 (1,000) people in the Small Auditorium. This is a home for professional music, pop culture and entertainment, as well as amateur performances and traditional culture, including a local professional orchestra and amateur performance groups. Swedish experts from the Akustikon company in Gothenburg, including Jan-Inge Gustafsson, helped to ensure outstanding acoustics. Thanks to a successful partnership with local manufacturers of acoustic elements, GORS can be proud of the best acoustics in Latvia at this time.

The mission for the “Latgale Embassy” is to become a centre for international impressions and global trends, but it is also a regional venue in that it creates and transmits the story of Latgale. Local cultural heritage is important here, largely influenced by Poland, Belarus and Russia, the locally dominant Catholic Church, and the ancient Latgalian language that is spoken by local residents. That does not mean, however, that the Latgale region focuses on a single venue. Less than 90 km away is another jewel of Latgale – the Rothko Art Centre, which was opened in Daugavpils in 2013 and is a multifunctional art centre in the historical Daugavpils Fortress. The pride and joy of the centre is a set of paintings by Mark Rothko, who was born in Daugavpils. This is the only collection of his works in Northeastern Europe. The centre has an acoustic hall with 200 seats, and it has become a citadel of modern art in Southern Latgale and Daugavpils.



"Cēsis" Concert Hall

Vidzeme, which covers central and Northern Latvia, has had a different history, with closer links to Estonia, in particular, during the Livonian era. Since the 16th century, Protestantism has dominated Vidzeme. Since the 18th century, there have been intensive choir performance traditions that are based in the religious practices of the Hernhutians. These lost their importance during the 20th century, but the choir movement that supports the tradition of Latvian Song Festivals, has been preserved in the region, as has piety toward a professional musical education and the ability to work hard on publicly important projects. Cēsis is one of the intellectual centres of Vidzeme. An 800-year-old and beautiful Livonian town along the banks of the Gauja River, Cēsis has wonderful historical buildings and cultural traditions. Musical enthusiasts in Cēsis have always come together in larger or smaller orchestras. In 1981, for instance, the Vidzeme Chamber Orchestra was established with the aim of bringing together musicians of various generations from Vidzeme. The nucleus was made up of teachers from music schools in Vidzeme, as well as students and graduates from the Cēsis High School of Music and the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. The orchestra performed more or less regularly, and it may be for this specific reason that symphonic music can now be heard outside of Rīga at places that have symphony orchestras and music high schools. The new network of regional concert halls is also based on such centres.

The Social Association building that was built in Cēsis in 1914 confirmed active public and cultural life. One of the walls of the historical building was torn down in 2010, and Latvian architect Juris Poga designed the Cēsis Northern Vidzeme Concert Hall by merging the old building with an innovative addition. The mission for the building is to be a multifunctional cultural centre, and most financing for the project came from the EFRD. The building has an acoustic concert auditorium with 800 seats, a chamber auditorium with an organ restored by the master restorer Jānis Kalniņš from Ugāle, another chamber auditorium for film showings, space for the Alfrēds Kalniņš Cēsis High School of Music, rehearsal rooms for the Vidzeme Chamber Orchestra and amateur ensembles, as well as an art gallery. The graphic symbol for the building was designed by the artist Ilmārs Blumbergs, and the logo features a geometric ornament that represents the basic values of Latvian identity. It is a sign of the inheritance and continuation of history. The symbol has five waves from the Gauja River as lines for notes, as well as a dot as a nucleus and centre for the content. The silhouette of the new hall stretches upward above the roofs of the ancient town, offering a view of the lovely Vidzeme landscape. The building is laconic and functional, and the much-beloved grey background emphasises the warmth of the birch wood that was used as part of the building's design, as well as the brilliant objects of art that are highly visible against the laconic background. The clearest benefit, however, is the outstanding acoustics of the concert hall – better acoustics than almost anywhere in Rīga.

The “Great Amber” concert hall in Liepāja will be opened in November 2015. Liepāja is an important regional centre in Kurzeme and a port on the shores of the Baltic Sea. It is rich with resources, including a professional theatre, a symphony orchestra, ancient musical traditions, and much potential for creativity. It was no surprise that the idea for a new concert hall was initiated by the conductor of the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, Imants Resnis. The orchestra performs important and regularly scheduled concerts with much international attention, and this, along with close links between the orchestra and the field of musical education in Liepāja, were the decisive factors in deciding to build the new hall. After several bills for tender, a contract was signed with the Giencke & Co. architectural firm from Austria. EFRD co-financing was provided for this project, too. The eight-story building will include a large auditorium with 1,080 seats and a chamber auditorium with 200 seats. It will provide a home for the Liepāja Emilis Melngailis Music High School.

The exterior of the building is reminiscent of a giant piece of amber found on the shore. It is naturally asymmetrical and with the typical colours of amber. It goes without saying that amber is one of Latvia’s symbols, and it can be found on the shores of the sea in Kurzeme, including Liepāja, quite often.

There is still the idea of a large and new acoustic concert hall in Rīga that would satisfy modern needs and would be acoustically appropriate for large symphonic and choral concerts. The Rīga Great Guild, where orchestras work and perform at this time, was not built as a concert hall. It has been adapted for concert purposes and is by no means ideal in acoustic terms.

There was the idea of building the acoustic concert hall on the AB Dam in the Daugava River, but the project stopped because of unforeseen technical problems and the economic crisis that nearly destroyed Latvia’s economy in 2008. It had a painful effect on musical life and infrastructure, and the idea remains on paper at this time.

Meanwhile, the new Latvian National Library, which was opened late in 2014, also offers new opportunities for concert performances. The so-called Castle of Light is one of the most important 21st century building projects in Latvia, and it is a modern and globally important centre for information and culture. The initial design was produced 20 years ago by Gunārs Birkerts from the United States. He is the world’s most distinguished Latvian architect, though his creative potential has mostly been manifested outside of Latvia. In this case, Birkerts has created a new cultural symbol that merges humanism and culture and makes reference to history, literature, music and the performing arts. Even more, it expresses the architect’s love for his country and its history. Concerts are offered in the Ziedonis Auditorium, which is an outstanding hall with more than 400 seats. On the 11th floor of the National Library there is a lovely view of the historical Rīga skyline, and it has already hosted various musical events, including the “Speak to a Composer” cycle of discussions that is organised by the Latvian Music Information Centre. Participants have included the composers Pēteris Vasks, Maija Einfelde and Imants Zemzaris.

Economic stabilisation and a symbiosis between state cultural planning and private initiative during the new century suggest that cultural policy in the musical sector is maturing, and this means not just more favourable development of the performing arts, as well as an improved infrastructure for concert performances. There is a greater offer of innovative, multimedia and complex musical projects, and this encourages the search for ever-new venues for music in a country in which music has become one of the most important forms of artistic life.



Conductor Māris Kupčs

Signe Lagzdina

TREASURES OF RIGA



The collection of the Rīga Museum of History and Navigation (RVKM) contains around 400 musical instruments, some of them dating back to the 16th century. Specialists say that some of these instruments are rarities at the European level. Visitors can examine folk music instruments, as well as outstanding examples of classical music instruments. Ancient music scholars and experts from Germany and the United States have praised the rarities, in particular the RVKM trombone collection, expressing the desire to study them in depth, but also to establish partnerships to organise exhibitions and concert performances with the historical instruments.

To be sure, not all of the instruments are on display. Most of them are carefully warehoused. The ancient music expert, conductor and *Collegium Musicum Rīga* director Māris Kupčs occasionally examines them, tests their sound, and awakens them. Māris is a knowledgeable and convincing guide at the museum, and he has researched the collection for some 20 years. It seems that he could approach every stand that is dedicated to music with his eyes closed, though the stands are separated by the large rooms of the museum and by other objects that characterise the lives of the people of Rīga – dishware, apparel, jewellery, weapons, candelabras, sewing machines, books, etc.

It is down to the city of Rīga that people can view rare and historical instruments at the museum today. For many centuries, the local government ensured that musicians would have the best instruments from Germany, and no cost was spared. Many of the treasures are in excellent condition even today. When the *Collegium Choro Musici Rīga* and the *Collegium Musicum Rīga* orchestra performed Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespers of St Mary* at the Church of St Mary Magdalene on Easter in 2015, the authenticity of the sound was boosted by one of the instruments from the museum's collection – a sackbut or Baroque trombone. Documents accompanying the instrument note that it was manufactured during the early period of Classicism by master instrument builder Johann August Crone in Leipzig. It was the brass instrument builder and trombonist Vairis Nartišs who brought the three centuries old instrument back to life after a period of silence that perhaps lasted for 150 years.

Sadly, there are few opportunities to play the precious instruments from the museum, and Māris Kupčs is a bit disgusted about that. Instruments must be played if they are to survive without damage, but the museum has very strict rules about what can be done with its exhibits. On the other hand, these rules also allow us to evaluate these Rīga treasures and to brag about them.

One of the stands at the museum features brass instruments from the 17th to the 19th century, including the aforementioned sackbut and others. Also in good condition is a German-manufactured French horn from the latter half of the 18th century, which the museum received in 1895 from the administration of the Church of St Peter in Rīga. Another very rare set of instruments is made up of Russian horns, which speak to musical performances during the latter half of the 18th century and the 19th century. Each horn is of a different pitch, and each was used to play a single note. It is said that the set in Rīga is complete, though only some of the horns are exhibited. Russian horn performances were entertainments for rich people in the Russian Empire, and the horns were probably played by peasants. Each had his own horn to perform a single note, with the entire ensemble quickly performing the most respected melodies of the day.

Trombones

The collection of trombones and French horns at the Rīga Museum of History and Shipping is more extensive and probably better than those in the home down of the master builder Crone, Leipzig, or, perhaps anywhere else in the world. The museum has a full collection of concert instruments from Crone, including a bass trombone, a tenor trombone and an alto trombone.

The collection features instruments from the periods of Baroque, Early Classicism and other eras. Visitors can observe the evolution of instruments from the past to the present, looking at how their form, the thickness of their materials and other nuances have changed over the course of time.

The trombone was not an orchestral instrument until the 19th century. Instead it was used for church needs, usually replacing a missing voice in a choir. Trombones were also played from the steeples of churches to announce important events or emergencies. They were also played to greet guests to the city. The city of Riga bought the high-quality collection of 18th century trombones from Leipzig at the recommendation of the conductor and composer Georg Michael Telemann. Georg Philip Telemann's grandson, who was trained by his grandfather to become an outstanding musician, arrived in Rīga in September 1773 to become cantor of the Cathedral School. Soon, the younger Telemann was also the organist and accompanist of the Riga Cathedral. He was a universal musician who did almost everything, including the organisation of concerts and the direction of music for church celebrations. Telemann, like those who preceded and succeeded him, often wrote to the Rīga City Council with complaints about a shortage of good instruments and vocalists. Eventually the city authorities agreed to expand the range of instruments. The year that is engraved on the instruments of the Crone collection suggest that the city could not afford to buy all of the instruments at once, so that was a gradual process.

Wagner? Which one?

The Hall of Columns at the Riga Museum of History and Shipping, one of the most outstanding public rooms in the style of Classicism in Rīga, was originally built to house a library. The excellent acoustics of the hall often ensure concert performances. Māris Kupčs' *Collegium Musicum* has filled the room with jewels of Baroque music more than just a few times. Two display cases in the Hall of Columns feature a selection of instruments, including a French horn, two bass trombones manufactured in the late 18th or early 19th century by the master builder Hoffmann, a trumpet that may have been used by the guards of Rīga and is known at the museum as a heraldic trumpet, several traverse flutes and a trombone.

It might be added that traverse flutes were high-quality instruments, but as the standard height of concert pitch changed, the instruments were adapted to the new sound, and so they can no longer be used as authentic late –18th century instruments. The trombone, for its part, is in very good technical condition, and a bit of cleaning would allow it to be played even at the level of 440 Hz.

Most intriguing at the Riga Museum of History and Shipping is a fairly heavy, but also elegant conductor's baton that is in the next display case, with a little white hand featured on the part of the baton that the conductor clutches (a typical symbol of the Freemasons). The annotation states that the baton belonged to one R.H. Wagner. According to legend, it was Richard Wagner, who worked at the Riga City Theatre for two-and-a-half seasons from 1837 until 1839, but it is more likely that the baton belonged to someone else whose surname was Wagner.





Musicians and others in Rīga

"We will find the names of city musicians in Rīga documents most often – complaints, requests, instructions, court documents, treasury documents, City Council minutes, church registers and petitions," Zane Gailīte has written in the book *On Music and Comedy in Rīga*. "They are everywhere." Musical instruments, in turn, talk to the habits and morals not just of musicians, but also others in Rīga.

One display case features a small pocket fiddle or *pochette* (French for "little pocket") – an instrument that could be carried around in a pocket. This is evidence of the 18th century, when richer Latvians in Rīga began to observe "Ornateness Rules" that were dictated by the Germans.



The *pochette* is also seen in a representation of a public dance, with an elegant dress, shoes, purse, parasol and other treasures, including the little instrument that was used by the dance teacher.

There are two types of *pochettes* – the *rebec*, which is similar to a violin and was played under the chin or on the shoulder, as well as the zither-type *pochette*, which was held vertically. Careful observers will note that the re string of the Riga *pochette* is bound in a thread, which speaks to the techniques of Venetian performances in the 17th century. The *Collegium Musicum Riga* orchestra has tested this nuance, and some musicians still use it. It is said to be a matter of taste, but the thread supposedly makes it easier to control the thickest string. The zither and bow are very elegant and high-quality in line with violin building traditions from the 18th century, and the instrument is engraved with the year 1781. One might think that violin builders seldom manufactured these

toy-like instruments, but that is not really true. Dance teachers were in much demand at that time, and the small fiddles were used to teach dance steps, as well as court etiquette.

Even earlier

The exhibition "Rīga Under the Rule of Poland and Sweden (1581-1710)" includes a sculpture of a Swedish military drummer that is 1.6 metres high and can be operated with a special mechanism. The annotation states that "Rīga had a city musician from the 15th century. The City Council hired educated musicians who played chorales from the steeple of the Church of St Peter each morning and each evening with four apprentices. During the night his job was to stand in the steeple so as to warn the people of Rīga about any approaching dangers. The city musician and his apprentices also took part in various public events, including weddings and other celebrations. Other ensembles of musicians began to emerge in Rīga during the 17th century. Musicians most often used brass instruments, but audiences in Rīga were also familiar with string instruments such as a viola, lute and, later, harpsichord. The most highly educated musician in Rīga and the director of musical life in the city was the cantor of the Cathedral School, and he also trained young musicians in the city."

The 17th century stand features a bass trombone, a French horn and a long trumpet which, it turns out, is not really a trumpet at all. In fact, this instrument was once a trombone. The bass trombone features signs of welding, which suggests how long and frequently the instrument was used.

Rarities in Rīga

During the Swedish period, metal instruments were bought in Nuremberg, and that was a sign of quality at the time. From 1730, French horns and trombones were delivered from Leipzig, where they were manufactured by the most respected instrument builder in the age of Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Heinrich Eichentopf (1686-1769). The period of Early Classicism, in turn, is represented by instruments from the aforementioned Leipzig-based master builder Johann August Crone. Nowhere else in the world you can find a full set of his trombones. On the basis of one of the Crone masterpieces at the museum, one of today's most outstanding masters of brass instrument builders, Rainer Egger, produced a copy, creating a model of an alto trombone that he has sold successfully. During the 19th century, too, the city of Rīga continued to purchase the best instruments in the world, including ones produced by the master builder Hoffmann from the period of Viennese Classicism. Among the 19th century musical instruments, of importance is a saxophone that was manufactured by the inventor of the instrument, Adolf Sax (1814-1894).

Another instrument that is in the collection is particularly rare and admired by Māris Kupčs. We do not know who built the instrument or brought it to the museum, but it is a viola da gamba from the late 17th century, with delicate and beautiful ornamentation on the neck and body of the instrument.

Visitors might think that the museum only has instruments manufactured abroad, but that is not true. French horns, trombones, flutes, violins and other instruments were also manufactured in Rīga. After years of research, in 1988, the organist Roberts Hansons and the oboist Elmārs Zemovičs (a long-time employee of the Museum of Music) prepared an index of Latvian instrument builders, including 76 piano manufacturers and joint ventures, 114 organ builders and joint ventures, 11 builders of harmoniums, 37 manufacturers of violins, five builders of brass instruments, as well as four factories where musical instruments were produced. We are proud of instruments that were built as far back as in 1774 in Rīga.

CD Review



YOU WONDER AT MY SONG
Pēteris Plakidis. Vocal Chamber Music
Maija Krīgena (mezzo-soprano), Pēteris Plakidis (piano), et.al.
ALBANY RECORDS

This is a nostalgic album, starting with the CD cover, which shows young Plakidis and young Krīgena, and ending with the content. Taken together, this conjures up memories about the distant past, when the two artists could be heard at concerts, and their records were played, studied, learned and tasted, allowing to be amazed at the unusual, simple and timely musical poetry of Pēteris Plakidis songs. Where could we find a more authentic example of the way in which Pēteris Plakidis' songs must be sung?

Andris Dzenītis, *Mūzikas saule*, 2015/2



NEW MUSIC FROM LATVIA < 2014
Music by Mārtiņš Vījums, Santa Ratniece, Andris Dzenītis, Jānis Petraškevičs, Santa Bušs and Sabine Ķezbere
LATVIAN MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE

This is a wonderful representative of contemporary Latvian music, and it is a delight to send it to musical specialists beyond Latvia's borders. Mārtiņš Vījums can be proud of the Great Music Prize that he received in 2012 for *TVĻĶORAAN*, which is heard on this disc. Santa Bušs is convincing in demonstrating that it is possible today to compose fresh music for solo piano. Santa Ratniece, as always, conjures up elegant and unseen worlds of sound, and she is helped in this by the Sensus string quartet. A good contrast is presented by Sabine Ķezbere's laconic *Monologue* and Andris Dzenītis' *Postludium. Ice* for symphonic orchestra. Above all, there is Jānis Petraškevičs' *Darkroom*, which reminds the listener of the Frankfurt Ensemble Modern project "Myths: From Where, to Where?" and the way in which this opus sparkled under the direction of conductor Peter Eötvös.

Orests Silābriedis, *Mūzikas saule*, 2015/2



Andris Dzenītis. E(GO)
The Saarbrücken-Kaiserslautern Symphony Orchestra, the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, the Silesian String Quartet, Arvids Kazlauskis (saxophone), Sinfonietta Rīga, the Radio Latvia Choir, conductors Karel Mark Chichon, Normunds Šnē and Sigvards Klava
SKANI / LATVIAN MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE

This is a case in which it is easier to listen to music than to write about it. There is nothing particularly easy about Dzenītis' opuses, which demand intense listening and undivided attention. There are many compositional values here – the ability to put together an extensive, structurally convincing and musically saturated form with unpredictable and exciting twists and turns in terms of dramaturgical development, an original and colourful harmonic language, polished and intense thematic material, and nuanced textures, tempos and rhythms. I can only add that not just *Prelude: Light and Postlude: Ice*, but also the First String Quartet: *Point Noir*, the Saxophone Concerto *E(GO)*, and *Om: Lux Aeterna* for choir testify to the composer's creative evolution, with the weight of musical concepts shifting from tragic existentialism to a more observant generalisation.

Armands Znotiņš, *Mūzikas saule*, 2015/2



Pēteris Vasks, SALA
Musica appassionata/Credo/Sala
The Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, conductor Atvars Lakstīgala
WERGO

The Pēteris Vasks albums that have been issued by WERGO have so far demonstrated full trust in Latvian musicians and ensembles. This is the sixth Vasks CD to be issued by the German publishing house, which has previously released albums by the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonietta Rīga, the pianist Vestards Šimkus, and the organist Tālvāldis Deksnis. The composer entrusted the opus that he composed during the new century to the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra and conductor Atvars Lakstīgala. There was good reason to do so, because once again we find that we can be proud of two equally valuable symphony orchestras here in Latvia.

Andris Dzenītis, *Mūzikas saule*, 2015/2



EŠĒNVALDS. NORTHERN LIGHTS

Choir music by Ēriks Ešēnvalds, Trinity College Choir Cambridge, conductor Stephen Layton
HYPERION

This composer is never afraid of being "old-fashioned," and he has deep piety toward literary texts, trying to reveal their content through sound and choosing texture that allows the audience to understand the text. I cannot imagine Ešēnvalds using asemantic text or language that no one, including the composer himself, can understand. This music is universally understandable. Unlike many contemporaries, Ešēnvalds thinks about aesthetic quality in the sense that the music must be beautiful. That is very difficult to achieve without becoming banal, instead drawing close to the completeness of beauty that exists in God's created world.

Juris Griņēvičs, *Mūzikas saule*, 2015/1



DŽINTARA CEĻŠ / AMBER ROAD

State Academic Choir *Latvija*, conductor Māris Sirmāis

12 songs composed by Latvian composers on the basis of poems from the countries of the Amber Road
STATE CHOIR LATVIJA

A dozen poets, translators and languages, a dozen composers, and a result that is completely surprising. Composing music in foreign and contemporary languages of poetry is by no means easy, and singing in Hungarian, Serbian, Greek, Turkish and other languages is not an everyday process even for the *Latvija* choir, which is capable of everything. The result is most interesting. Though in stylistic terms, the programme is rather homogeneous to a certain extent, there are a few special creative flourishes, as well. Apparently the phonetics of language led the composers to produce unusual work – the Slavic and broad breath of Juris Vaivods' music, Imants Zemzaris' antique references to Italian madrigals, the unusually warm miniature produced by Raimonds Tīguls in Hungarian...

Iļze Medne, *Mūzikas saule*, 2014/4



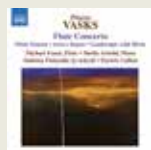
JAZZ IN LATVIA 2014

Various performers

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

Various styles, ensembles of various sizes, with vocals (the Inga Bērziņa Quartet, the Daumants Kalniņš Quintet, the Māris Briēžkalns Quintet, Kristīne Prauliņa and the Radio Latvia Big Band), as well as without vocals (the Raimonds Macats Quintet, the Radio Latvia Big Band, the Laima Jansone Trio, the Kaspars Kurdeko Tree Stones Quartet ensemble), plus solo piano (Toms Juhņevičs). Stylistically dominant are distinctly classically focused and harmonically good-sounding atmospheres, and without scorning anyone else, I will say that my ear most enjoys the slightly expanded and interestingly broken sound structures of the Matīss Čudars Quintet, as well as the timbral imagination of Laima Jansone...

Andris Dzenītis, *Mūzikas saule*, 2014/2



PĒTERIS VASKS. FLUTE CONCERTO

Flute Sonata, Aria e danza, Landscape with Birds

Michael Faust, flute, Sheila Arnold, piano, Sinfonia Finlandia Jyväskylä, Patrick Gallois
NAXOS

This year we mark the 20th anniversary of the first foreign release of Pēteris Vask's music, but this album is the first that offers a look at the composer's flute music. Presumably, many people will perform the music, because there are few contemporary flute concertos, and Vask's *Concerto* is valuable in this regard. The composition is masterful, and the composer has done very well in dealing with the balance problems that are sometimes seen in works of this genre, especially in terms of contrasting the gentle sound of the flute with the sound of an entire orchestra.

Iļze Medne, *Mūzikas saule*, 2014/1



INDRA RĪŠE. A BIT ABOVE THE EARTH

Chamber music, various performers

INDRA RĪŠE, LATVIAN MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE

This new album by the composer Indra Rīše represents opuses that were composed between 1996 and 2011, thus representing the timely work of the talented and fairly unusual composer. The disc offers various and diverse types of chamber music. Like many of her contemporaries, Indra Rīše is interested in unusual ensembles of performers, including solo accordion and music for accordion and saxophone. *Three Spring Episodes* is one of the most successful compositions, but it is beat by the title track, *A Bit Above the Earth*, for flute and piano. The composer herself plays the piano on this album together with the flutist Anete Toča. All in all, this is healthy music that is not excessively intellectualised, and the performances, too, are successful.

Juris Griņēvičs, *Mūzikas saule*, 2013/5



AT THE FOOT OF THE SKY

Choir music by Ēriks Ešēnvalds

The State Choir *Latvija*, conductor Māris Sirmāis
STATE CHOIR LATVIJA

Ēriks Ešēnvalds has long since proven himself as the most vivid composer from the younger generation of composers in Latvia. As a choir singer himself, the composer is very familiar with the technical and emotional abilities of a choir, and we find that this is an excellent approach in this new album, too. Apart from the last song, this is an album of contemporary music, with the composer seeking and often finding the highest level of aesthetic qualities – spirituality.

Juris Griņēvičs, *Mūzikas saule*, 2013/4

MUSIC IN LATVIA CONTACTS 2015

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1. Romualds Kalsons (1936). Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1977) 1st part Allegro ma non troppo / 6'24

Valdis Zariņš (violin), Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, conductor Vassily Sinaisky
Latvian Radio Studio recording, 1971

2. Kristaps Pētersons (1982). Introduction to the opera – lecture “Mikhail and Mikhail Play Chess” (2014) / 6'

Andris Lapiņš (tenor), musicians of the Latvian National Opera,
conductors Ainārs Rubiķis and Atvars Lakstīgala
Live recording from the first performance at the Latvian National Opera, 12.03. 2014

3. Artūrs Maskats (1957). “My Atlantis Has Drowned”, Scene 7 from the 2nd act of the opera “Valentina” (2014) / 5'06

Inga Kalna (soprano), Latvian National Opera orchestra, conductor Modestas Pitrenas
Live recording from the first performance at the Latvian National Opera, 12.03. 2014

4. Anna Veismane (1976). “Wings” for cello and accordion (2014) / 6'18

TWOgether Duo (Poland): Magdalena Bojanowicz (cello), Maciej Frąckiewicz (accordion)
Live recording from the MINSTREL exchange concert, Spiķeri Concert Hall, Riga, 26.03. 2014

5. Pēteris Vasks (1946). “The Fruit of Silence” for choir and piano (2013) / 7'26

Latvian Radio Choir, Vestards Šimkus (piano), conductor Sigvards Kļava
From the 1st SKANI label CD “The Fruit of Silence”, LMIC/SKANI 039,
recorded at the St.John Church in Riga, October 2014

6. Jānis Ivanovs (1906). Symphonic poem “Rainbow” (1939) / 9'27

Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, conductor Andris Poga
Live recording, Riga Great Guild, 19.09.2014

7. Jāzeps Vītols (1863). “Lullaby” (1895) / 3'08

Sergejs Osokins (piano)
Live recording, Latvian Academy of Music, 30.09.2013

8. Emīls Dārziņš (1875). “Melancholic Waltz” (1904) / 5'34

Emīls Dārziņš Music High School Symphony Orchestra, conductor Andris Vecumnieks
Live recording from the Emīls Dārziņš Music High School 70th anniversary concert, Riga Great Guild, 4.04.2015

