

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 Stūresteps 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 70<sup>th</sup> 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 140<sup>th</sup> 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.