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The National Music Identity in the Global Cultural Crossroad. Some Still Topical Local Problems in the Latvian Music History Writing

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The question of how to characterize the professional music history in Latvia, balancing the national and global contextual perceptions, remains is topical. The complex study, which describes the music culture of Latvia in the past, still has not been written. At the same time in the Latvian music history studies nowadays is very actual issue of how to explain local musical culture process and specific examples in the past. One of the methodological problems is the question of how to contextualize in the global heritage perception those local traditions which developed in Latvian territory in the past in connection with music cultural identity landmarks nowadays. Analyzing this issue, this article will offer view the following aspects:

- the problem fix the starting point of the professional musical culture in Latvian music historiography – Baltic German's cultural space, which were created from 13th until 19th century, on the one hand, and the Latvian nation formation in the 19th century end and 20th century early, on the other hand – how interpret past facts and processes not only local (national), but also in common European music history context?;

- the local (national) and global process interactions in the 20th century Latvian music history and research (in relation also to researches about national music history of Soviet occupation period with specific political mythology);

- the past music culture's perception in connection with national identity concept creation in Latvia 21st century early.

Based on the music history writing problems in Latvia, as a specific example, it might be a good basis for discussions on various issues, which will be characterized in this article.

Keywords: Latvian Music History, National Identity, Local Peculiarities, Global Context

Introduction

This article will focus on issue of how to characterize the professional music history in one specified country, in Latvia, balancing the national and global contextual perceptions. What kind nowadays is situation in the Latvian music culture history researching? The complex study, which describes the music culture of Latvia in the past, still has not been written. At the same time in the Latvian music history studies nowadays is actual issue of how to explain local musical culture process and specific examples in the past. One of the methodological problems is the question of how to contextualize in the global heritage perception those local traditions, which developed in Latvian territory in the past in connection with music cultural identity landmarks nowadays. In turn, the treatment of such concepts as *national* and *national cultural heritage* according to modern understanding has become one of the key issues.

Writing about music history it is not possible ignore the characteristic approaches of the general history research. We can always find two approaches – focusing on a particular ideology or expose past facts and events on critically distanced analysis. In Latvian music history writings this choice today is a basic stepping point. Because, that the past culture's perception in connection with

national identity concept creation today is very actual question in Latvia. Supposedly, it is not exaggeration to claim it that after collapse of the former Soviet totalitarian regime not only in Latvia, but also in all Eastern Europe, the issue about national identity in global cultural context is one of the most important.

A long time lost opportunities to develop their own format for the national cultural relations with the global processes today is one of the main reasons for each Eastern European country today dominate concept on national culture originality. If dominate such public mood – can be disprove the National aspect role in the perception in state cultural processes? At least Latvian music history research this option is not fully possible. Of course, the national culture research the overall objective always is find possible weaknesses and mistakes, offer them an alternative. However, there must be a rational balance between a variety of new ideas and society perceptions and beliefs. In my opinion, this approach is actual in the general science theory. It has based on the requirement to evaluate all critically and not accept any truth as ready-made qualities. Must convince with rational, humane values supportive arguments, rather than abstract faith and personal opinions. At the same time cannot ignore fact that society sometime is willing to accept all or only part of the new ideas about past cultural heritage.

What kind theoretically modelled balance can be given in the Latvian music history writing case? One of the basic problem is fix the starting point of the professional musical culture in Latvian music historiography: on the one hand, the Baltic German's cultural space, which were created until 19th century, on the other hand, the Latvian nation formation in the 19th century end and 20th century early. How interpret past facts and processes not only local (national), but also in common European music culture history context?

A long time researching of professional musical culture in Latvia has been dominated by National Romanticism position. According to it, the general focus was on the Latvian origin composers (or other nations composers, who were clearly identified with common Latvian culture) creative biographies interpretation. In this approach the Baltic German's and other nations contribution to the professional music culture was analysed either as small preface before Latvian composers creative work complex analysis, or seen as fully autonomous research field. In addition, up to the 20th century end nobody musicologist in Latvia this topic especially did not investigate. During the Soviet occupation period was cultivated formal approach. According to it art researching was need reflect ideas of the Communist theory and highlight Russian culture as influence factor to the other cultures development. In turn, the contemporary in the overall society perception the past music culture exist one a very specific local factor, which does not allow to directly connect the Baltic Germans and Latvian societies contributions in the one organic integrity. I would like to emphasize that the speech is about the impossibility to a direct connection in society perception. However, this does not preclude that to be able to exist the indirectly integrity. This one specific local factor is perception about some nation participating in the imaginary global culture process creation.

1. Situation in Latvian professional music culture history before 20th century beginning

Many of those outside Latvia who are interested in music may be surprised by the fact that, even until the 19th century, the main ethnic group living in Latvia – Latvians – for historical reasons were not full rulers of their own land. Beginning with the 13th century, when Latvia was Christianized by the German Crusaders and Catholic Church, Latvians for many centuries were lost their ability to be real rulers of their land. In the period between the 13th and 16th centuries, the territory of nowadays Latvia was included in the Livonia which formed by the territories of Latvia and Estonia. The most important political centre of Livonia was the city of Riga, and this state mainly ruled representatives from Germany. In the 16th century, the nation of Livonia ceased to exist.

In 1629 after the Polish-Swedish war the historically Latvian ethnographic region of Vidzeme came under the rule of Sweden while the ethnographic region of Latgale came under the rule of Poland. In 1721, after the *Northern War* between Russia and Sweden, Vidzeme came under the rule of Russia. In 1772, after the division of Poland among many European nations, Latgale also came under the rule of Russia. In 1795, the Kurzeme duchy ceased to exist as an independent nation and it was included in the Russian empire. In the period of Czarist Russian, lasting from the 18th century until the beginning of the 20th century (World War I), the territory of Latvia was artificially divided in several provinces. Only in the 20th century, after the end of World War I, taking advantage of the historical situation in Europe, in 1918 Latvians established an independent state of their own on their territory – the Republic of Latvia [1].

According to the above information one of the local peculiarities that distinguish the Latvian national cultural heritage from the other eastern and western European countries today is that in all classical arts until the 19th century is not possible clearly identified a Latvian origin artist representation. Of course, in the modern sense of music history is not exclusively some excellent composers creative work in the past. However, this aspect cannot be completely ignored. Especially in a situation where someone country's society perception cultivate demand about outstanding personality contribution to national culture heritage creation. And the following settings cannot be completely excluded in principle, basing only to clearly scientific, rational arguments. In the Latvian situation, the key word in relation to above local specificities is the term *Latvian*.

In English this designation – *Latvian* – indicates to a specific nationality and belonging to the state, which may consist of a variety peoples. In turn, in Latvian language this designation – *Latvian* – refers only to the affiliation to a specific nation. Thus, the state designation is Latvia and in accordance with the local historical tradition, these designations – *Latvia* and *Latvians* - are not synonyms. This is one of the main reasons why in relation to also with linguistic and its psychological perception common historical experience in Latvia traditionally is shared between Latvians and other nation's actions in Latvia. According to the above-described perceptions the Baltic Germans actions in the past cannot be seen as *Latvians* heritage in the purely ethnic interpretation. However, after the Soviet occupation the local or national cultural heritage researching and perception in the society is increasingly dominate the idea about common national heritage, which has created different nations in previous centuries. Several excellent Baltic Germans personalities cannot be regarded as representatives of Latvian art according to the narrow ethnic perception. However, Baltic Germans and Russian, Hebrew, Swedish, and other people's representative's activities in Latvia is considered to be the common national cultural heritage component today. This formula, which is increasingly starting to strengthen in Latvian music historiography is one of the main pillars of to analyze the issue of national values and the global context of professional music culture history in Latvia.

It is interesting to see exactly how in recent years gradually changing research approaches of music history writing in Latvia. Seven years ago in Latvian Academy of Music took place a special seminar on these issues. Opinions about the Baltic Germans and Latvian music history in common framework was different. However, if we put great emphasis on musical life and social context in our understanding about past music culture, then in the Latvian case of two historic cultural communities heritage research make completely separate cannot be convincingly substantiate. This is evidenced if we focus on two important moments – it is a matter about adaptation of traditions and an outstanding personality evaluation of the activities not only local, but also in the global context.

For example, since the 14th century Baltic Germans gradually established a several musical institutions, which in the long term were developed as models for Latvian society. These institutions included, such as the Riga's Doms Cathedral's cantor and school model. From 18th century extensively widespread the so-called *Unitas Fratrum* or *Moravians church* movement in one Latvian historical region (Vidzeme), the 18th century end were founded opera house in Riga

and since 18th century end from German were adopted tradition create different musical societies [2].

It is significant that in the 19th century first half in one part of Latvian modern territory was created church school system based on the German Protestant Church tradition. This system emphasized the importance of music element in education. The system also experienced an phenomenon, which today is called as the Latvian Song Festival. Starting from 1873 until nowadays they are a regular occurrence (today they occur every five years), being organised in Latvia as a national (regional) celebration of the uniqueness of its cultural traditions. Today they are a celebration with more than 10,000 singers in a combined festival choir who sing *a cappella* choir songs in a classical Latvian tradition. By the way, on November 7, 2003, UNESCO proclaimed that the Latvian Song and Dance Celebration tradition was a masterwork of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Of course, the national music historiography Song Festival today have become self-evident Latvian national culture symbol. However, developing more extensive contextual analysis about this past tradition it can be concluded that long time in the Latvian national music history writings was actually ignored fact that unique Latvian song festival tradition arose directly from *sängerfest* idea, which were cultivated in Germany 19th century. Second half of the 19th century, Baltic Germans four times organized *Baltische Sängerkunst* in Riga and Tallinn (Reval at that time). Thus, origin of this unique Latvian tradition cannot be understood only in the past of one national culture. In fact, its researches helps to uncover wider contexts of European music history related to various aspects, which cannot be ignored within the one national music history framework [2] .

A similar example is a professional music education system in Latvia. The first and only Latvian Music High School (nowadays Academy) was founded in 1919, when returned to Latvia to live in the famous St. Petersburg Conservatory professor Jāzeps Vītols (1863–1948). However, in Latvia already approximately half a century before it existed several private music education institutions of Baltic Germans: *Das Erste Musikinstitut in Riga* (1864, based on the model of Dresden Conservatory), *Kaiser Musikverein Riga Abteilung* (1873), *Schule der Tonkunst* (1877), *Riga Musik Schule* (1885). Overall, in the 19th century second half and 20th century early many Latvian musicians received professional music education foundations in these institutions. In turn, each of institutions represented a variety of traditions in music education which existed in Germany and Russia at that time. It was as an invisible historical process. Mainly because in the 19th century and 20th century early relations between Latvians and Baltic Germans were very complicated. However, even in this supposedly invisible process researching can uncover many aspects that reflect professional music traditions of Latvian culture, both nationally and on a global perception of context.

Similar is also question about the personality role in the musical culture tradition development process. The previous centuries in Latvia had been operating several famous musicians whose creative work results is not fully understood only of one country national cultural historical context. This is evidenced by the following facts.

The period at the end of medieval culture in Riga was created anonymous Gregorian chant collection, which today is known as the *Missale Rigense*. This is an interesting example of the universal Gregorian chant tradition in the local context and understand this collection is possible only in the context of the Northern European church music traditions at that time.

In the Baroque period the professional music cultural traditions have represented a number of brilliant musicians, who was arrived in Latvia from Germany. A small country, which covered part of today's Latvian territory – Duchy of Courland and Semigallia or Courland – the 17th century and 18th century operated a number of musicians who were associated with both the German and the Russian court music culture. For example, Franz Adam Veichtner (1741–1822), German violinist and composer. He was *Konzertmeister* to the Courland court at Jelgava 1765–1795, and later served court at St. Petersburg. His output includes three operas (among other things, they are the first

samples of the opera's genre, which were created and performed on Latvian territory, in the German language), other vocal (choral) works, symphonies and violin music.

Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804). In the Duchy of Courland he had worked approximately one year, 1785–1786. Overall, Hiller was German composer and conductor, regarded as the creator of the German singspiel, musical genre combining spoken dialogue and popular song. Hiller learned to play several instruments and to sing and briefly studied law while developing wide intellectual and literary interests. In relation to Hiller is one historical discovery that has been made in Latvia recently. In one of the Latvian church, in Liepāja city, were found cantata (under the title *Tā simtā dziesma / It hundredth song*) score with biblical texts in Latvian. In fact, this is the first known example of the classical music genre in the Latvian language.

In 18th century Riga there were two Baroque and classical style of composers, whom musical heritage is significant part of the common European music history. Johann Valentin Meder (1649–1719) in Riga composed in some of his compositions, which are known for this style music performers today. In turn, the second half of the 18th century in Riga lived excellent Organ play virtuoso and composer Johann Gottfried Mützel (1728–1788). His six concerts for piano today is very bright late baroque and classicist synthesis examples of the European music history. In addition, in the background Riga – an important economic centre with specific local traditions.

Riga's city founded in the 13th century early. Latvians Society several centuries in Riga existed, however in the written cultural texts their presence hardly be found. However, Riga as merchant's city in several centuries reflected a very pragmatic approach to the development of cultural traditions. Riga was not someone royal residences city. In addition, the great role of the merchants' society was one of the reasons why Riga over the centuries (until 20th century) did not become a so-called University town (until second half of the 19th century). This factor had a significant impact on the professional music cultural traditions development in Riga, which is the largest cultural centre in Latvia past and nowadays. It is able to detect many different interesting facts, which not only in locally but also internationally context reflects one national cultural development [1].

2. The newest period of the Latvian National music culture: some significant personalities in historically variable social and cultural conditions context

In turn, in the newest Latvian music history period there are many issues which potentially is interesting not only from viewpoint of national culture originality, but is interesting also in the global context. I will illustrate this with three examples from the latest period of music history in Latvia. According to Latvian music historiography Latvian composer **Jāzeps Vītols** (1863–1948) is the one of the first Latvian origin truly universal master whose creative work raised almost all the main genres to the level of classic perfection and faultless artistry. He is the intellectual father of several generations of composers, founder of Latvian Academy of Music. Vītols role in Latvian professional music cultural development is very great. In turn, some his musical works over the last hundred years has become as Latvian national symbols. Especially in connection with the national Song Festival tradition [3]. However, whether outside of the national cultural mythology there are any aspects that might be interesting also to global musical heritage context? From Latvian music history researchers viewpoint such aspects definitely exist.

Vītols 19th century second half and 20th century early was represented one tendency in academic music, which cultivated classical traditions of the romantic style framework. This tendency reflected the so-called *New Russian School* or St. Petersburg composers group's (under the leadership of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, 1844–1908) aesthetic ideas and it is a very interesting phenomenon in the European music history. Vītols in a number of his musical works represents this stylistic tendency very bright. Moreover, he not only in St. Petersburg but also in Riga has been a professor of composition and theory of composition not only for Latvians, but also for other composers in modern European countries. He has been a teacher for many Estonian, Lithuanian,

Polish, German and foreign composers and music theorists. Among them, for example, Estonian composer Juhan Aavik (1882–1982), Lithuanian composers Vladas Jakubėnas (1904–1976) and Stasys Vainiūnas (1909–1982), Russian composers Nikolay Myaskovsky (1880–1950) and Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953), Armenian descent (also related with Georgian musical culture) composer and famous theorist Sarkis Barhudarian (1887–1973), outstanding American (born in the former Russian Empire, Kharkiv) music theorist Joseph Schillinger (1895–1943) and many others.

Why this academic tendency, whom was represented Vītols, in contemporary texts about music history today highlighted on a lot less than the late Romanticism and Modernist creative provocations? What kind in the past had Vītols influence at different countries composers' creative work in the long-term? In my opinion, the following issues very good example of how one national music history writing process is probably some topical themes of one national culture framework expand and analyze in the global context. Thus offering, the public educational information about national symbols and their perception in the global context more in an objective sense.

Another example in the Latvian music historiography is significant symphonic music composer after World War II. This composer is **Jānis Ivanovs** (1906–1983) – a musician who in the field of symphonic music (Ivanovs is the author of twenty one symphonies, composed within 1933 and 1983) has represented a synthesis of classical traditions and Modernism and whose own artistic brightness is comparable to the music of such composers as Arthur Honegger and Dmitry Shostakovich [1]. Being a distinguished personality in music, Ivanovs was brought closer to the Soviet occupation regime as, in his own way, an *official composer* of Latvia (in certain aspects similar to Shostakovich, even though the fates of Ivanovs and Shostakovich were different). This also required certain ideological concession gestures in the creative work of Ivanovs (special compositions, dedicated to the Communist party). However, in general, Ivanovs successfully developed his own individual style, which is familiar to music connoisseurs even outside of Latvia. Many of Ivanovs' symphonic works have been released on CD by the British firm *Campion Records* at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century [6].

However, why nowadays Ivanovs symphonic music is so unknown? To answer this question it is necessary to investigate how in the Soviet regime context was able to develop a modernist aesthetic ideas in stylistically moderate form. This approach which represented Ivanovs and his music artistic value researching, of course, is not possible only within a single national culture framework. Because such a process was characterized by all the countries of Eastern Europe at that time.

The third example are contemporary Latvian composer **Pēteris Vasks** (1946), his music perception and evaluation of Latvian and world. Vasks is the most internationally recognized Latvian composer of the early 21st century. Several of his music works have been first-performed as well as recorded on *CD* in different countries. The regular publishing house of his music proves to be *Schott Music* in Germany. In turn, composer often commenting his music emphasizes belonging to the Latvian national culture, accentuate its special originality in the global cultural space (Kudiņš, 2005). For example, in the journal *Notes*, in 2002, published such Vasks comment: “For me what is important is to speak as a representative of a very small, unhappy but courageous country which has suffered much. In my music I speak Latvian” (Engelhardt, Jeffers. *Notes*. Vol. 58, No. 4, June 2002). In addition, over the last decade in relation to, for example, Vasks and Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (1935) music, in the music publicistic has often been raised idea on some special style quality in the Baltic composers music [4].

In my opinion, Vasks music deeper analysis shows that one of the Latvian composer's individual style characteristics reflects echoes the of Romanticism and Neo-romanticism tendencies. These tendencies in Latvian academic music history has been very stable and can be seen as one of the specific local characteristics. In a broader context can also see the following regularities.

A great number of less internationally-known mid- and later-generation composers, currently living in Latvia (aged 40 and older), among them Romualds Jermaks (1931), Agris Engelmanis (1936-2010), Romualds Kalsons (1936), Leons Amoliņš (1937), Maija Einfelde (1939), Imants

Kalniņš (1941), Pēteris Butāns (1942), Vilnis Šmīdbergs (1944), Pēteris Vasks (1946), Pēteris Plakidis (1947), Georgs Pelēcis (1947), Juris Karlsons (1948), Alvilis Altmanis (1950), Aivars Kalējs (1951), Andris Riekstiņš (1951), Selga Mence (1953), Arturs Maskats (1957), Ilona Breģe (1959), Rihards Dubra (1964), Indra Riše (1961), Andris Vecumnieks (1964), and others, basically present in their music (symphonic in particular) classically traditional music language expression, organically synthesising it, not too radically, with features of the Modernism of the first half of the 20th century in diverse individual variations. Neoromanticism is the most broadly represented tendency in the music of the above-mentioned Latvian composers in various classical genres. In turn, one of the Latvian composers Neoromantic' music local peculiarity are emphasis to national element, to Latvian folk-music allusions [5].

Due to this fact, music of these composers substantially differs from the music of Latvian composers of the youngest generation (40 years and younger), among which the most outstanding personalities are, for example, Anitra Tumševica (1971), Rolands Kronlaks (1973), Mārtiņš Viļums (1974), Gundega Šmite (1977), Santa Ratniece (1977), Andris Dzenītis (1977), Ēriks Ešenvalds (1977), Jānis Petraškevičs (1978), Kristaps Pētersons (1982) and Evija Skuķe (1992). The creative searches of these composers are notable for their more radical approach to the adaptation and creation of concepts of new music languages and expressions. Gradually Latvian composers of the youngest generation have, in their own and specific way, taken over the music culture process of the classical genre. However, in the sense of aesthetic and stylistic position, the more traditionally oriented older generation of composers in Latvia still holds a notable balance in the field of their music creations.

Why the situation in Latvia differs essentially from the experience gained in other countries of Europe, which in the 20th century witnessed intense dedication to the tendencies characteristic of both – the aesthetics of Modernism and that of Postmodernism? The answer is to be found, focusing on several specific factors, which influenced the development of music history in Latvia in the 20th century and the early 21st century. In addition, it cannot be done without the comprehensive analysis of international, global process.

Some conclusions

If we ask the question – is it possible nowadays to exclude impact aspect of cultural nationalism in the music history researching and in the cultural identity creation process? My observations lead to the conclusion that this impact cannot be excluded. Today in many countries is characteristically boast with national cultural originality. It is a powerful factor that definitely impact on the history research. Because each researcher's conduct, even unconsciously influenced by the context and the trends of one country's cultural space. Therefore, this approach – a national cultural heritage originality as part of the one state national identity – still an issue. Research in this direction also may give interesting and valuable results.

However in any history, including music history researching general aim is give a reasoned explanation or answer the following questions. Why some value or an activity that is considered to be very important in the some local context, is not a perceived as very important globally? May be some experience which in local scale is seen as a very original, in fact are only one local variant in the global process? Such issues about one of country music culture can certainly provide the necessary balance sense about several past process perception today. In other words – an understanding about identity in music culture is possible only if when we well aware what kind boundaries we have need infringe when we view on the past heritage.

Such goal – be aware of border and need be able a positive critical its violate – is also one of the main tasks of Latvian music history research today. This task is likely to be relevant in other countries. However exist a significant historical experience differences between countries.

Therefore it is not possible to automatically apply a ready formula on these issues, whenever facing local and global perception of history and present cultural identity perception.

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