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THE *FORBIDDEN FRUIT* SYNDROME VS. THE *FILLING AN EMPTY NICHE* SYNDROME: A CASE STUDY OF THE MUSICAL OUTPUT OF DIASPORA LATVIAN COMPOSERS

Jonāne, Jūlija, *Dr. art.*National School of Arts
Riga Cathedral Choir School
PIKC NMV Rīgas Doma kora skola
Meža iela 15, Rīga, LV – 1048**Summary:**

The principal aim of this paper – analyzing the musical oeuvre of more significant composers in exile to point out the thematic direction, thus counteracting the two different areas – under and beyond the regime, proving that ideology affects not only those, who are in its geographical area, but provokes a reaction and resistance to those, which work beyond its borders as well.

Since 1944 Latvian culture underwent some kind of not only geographical, but also thematic decomposition and developed within two separate realms or territories, which were created by composers, who lived in the territory of occupied – Soviet Latvia, and those who owing to the political situation had immigrated to other countries.

The high level of the national patriotism, spirituality and many other positions and technical achievements are noticed on the other side of regime – in exile. So we can see, how the ideology provokes not only the “Syndrome of Forbidden Fruit” under the Soviets, but also a “Syndrome Empty Niches’ Filling” beyond the “Iron Curtain” as well as an “Appealing to music and singing” on both sides of the “Iron Curtain”.

Keywords: *Forbidden Fruit, Music of Occupied Latvia, exiled composers.*

As is well known, beginning in 1944, there was a **split** (both geographic and thematic) into two territories in the music culture of many Eastern European countries, as well as **Latvia** – the creative spheres of Latvian composers that remained in occupied Latvia (at that time – the Latvian SSR) and that of exiled composers. For the composers that remained in Latvia, there was an artificially enforced change in generations, thematics and genres, which formed its own connections, contexts, and unique aspects.

Up to the time of this geographic split, the central compositional school was founded by Jāzeps Vītols (1863-1948; a graduate of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s compositional school and a colleague, and a long time professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory). Over the course of the 25 years of Latvia’s first independence, he taught a new generation of composers, developing the spiritual characteristics, which were vital for the new nation – not just the understanding of the classic academic form and genre, but also a **national consciousness**, and respect for **folk music values, religiousness**, etc.

However, as a result of the division of Latvian musicians, these noted trends were almost completely silenced in the creative work of those composers that remained in Latvia after 1944. Among them are Lūcija Garūta, Ādolfs Skulte, Jēkabs Graubiņš, Jānis Ivanovs, Leonīds Vīgners, and others. These changes had a particularly harsh effect on the themes of **national identity** and **independence**, which, through the verses of folk songs, were, via symbols and stylizations, also included in texts by Latvian poets, and these were freely and often used by composers in their own works.

Obviously, these two cultural spaces had separate existences **behind the iron curtain**. Any kind of communication (in the letters to the relatives of the musicians) was minimized, as well as any attempts to perform internationally respected compositions in the territory of Latvia, as a rule,

failed. Additionally, openly mentioning exiled Latvians was discouraged, if not entirely banned, and this kind of collaboration was disrupted in many ways.

This *method* is confirmed by the creative work of **Lūcija Garūta** (1902-1977), a composer who remained in Latvia. The premiere of her largest scale vocal symphonic work – oratorio *Live Fervency*, which involved the best musicians of that era, took place with success on January 13, 1968 at the Riga Great Guild. Unfortunately, Lūcija Garūta's creative work was often analyzed politically. Maybe because of her behavior and education in France. In such a way, for example, is the first section of the above-mentioned opus – *Calling*, which was realized by the antiphon texture of two choirs. It was enough to include the Rainis text *Brothers, be close those who are far – are you awake?* which was followed by the response: *We are awake!* for the oratorio to be struck from the repertoire and never performed again.

Correspondingly, in Latvia itself, we should note the most well-known theme symbol example – Jānis Ivanovs' 4th symphony "Atlantis", which, with its significant title projects the destruction of the *old world* and the homeland in particular. This is also what Jewish writer Valentīna Freimane, born in Latvia and later emigrated to Germany, wrote in her novel "Goodbye, Atlantis", published in 2010, and this inspired Latvian composer Artūrs Maskats to create his opera "*Valentīna*" in 2014. This link between themes and symbols could only be realized in Latvia after 50-70 years...

The further development of the expression of the fate of nationally colored, national identity and sense of independence and religiousness was formed mainly by **exiled composers** (who were also mainly graduates of Jāzeps Vītols' composition class), who were indeed vigilant about these themes! Most of the composers found sanctuary and work in democratic countries, most often in churches. This *passing of the baton* in themes of the sacred, the destruction of the nation's independence and, to a certain degree, the apocalypse, can be clearly seen in many works of art created at the beginning of the 1940s, or were initiated based on impressions of the events of this time period.

For example, the theme of the apocalypse in the homeland was powerfully expressed in the **cantata *God, Your Land is Burning!*** (1943) by **Andrejs Eglītis** and **Lūcija Garūta**, which is like a scream that is emotionally direct and made of varied emotional threads, as well as being a message or prayer, which, like a refrain, is woven throughout the entire cantata. The verses present both a modern and sacred line, which often were combined in the scores of the first Latvian patriotic cantatas. The cantata was premiered at a time when tanks were already rolling in the streets of Riga – this can be heard in the first recording made by the radiophone, which I will not share at this time, but I will share a more qualitative and newer recording.

The cantata *God, Your Land is Burning!* is a dramatic wartime work. The tragic sense of apocalypse and destruction is concentrated in the very first phrase of the work, contrasting the symbolic concepts of life and death, the powerlessness of the nation and the people in the face of fate. The feeling of *Dies irae* is felt throughout the first section of the cantata; the suffering of people on Earth is compared to the *Judgement Day* of the Bible.

In the continuation of the work's dramatic concept the authors see the only conclusion to be the overcoming of the sense of **inevitable death**. Only Christian faith could provide a confidence in the beginning of a new life at the moment of destruction. Including this idea of overcoming death, the opus became timeless and could be understood by people of various cultures, languages and eras. These concepts within the cantata indicate a vital link to the **requiem** semantic. The *Lord's Prayer* section of the cantata, as well as the Biblical symbols (God, Judgement Day, etc.) included in the poetry as well as direct quotes from Holy Scripture create a **sacred cantata** semantic model¹.

It is notable that the fateful verses by **Andrejs Eglītis** (1912-2006) in ***God, Your Land is Burning!*** also received the attention of exiled composers on the other side of the ocean, taking over

¹ This theme is widely explored in diploma thesis of Purvīce, Jana [1].

the content and continuing the genre's development outside of Latvia. In that way, the text spoke to Bruno Skulte, who created the vocal-instrumental work *God, Your Land is Burning!* in 1949 – 6 years later, and composer Tāivaldis Ķeniņš, using A. Eglītis' words, composed a cantata for men's choir and organ *A Prayer for Latvia* in 1951 – 8 years later.

Bruno Skulte's (1905-1976) cantata for four soloists, mixed choir and symphony orchestra *God, Your Land is Burning!* was already completed in 1949, while the composer was still in Oldenburg (Germany), while its premiere took place on March 10, 1951, directed by the composer, in New York, at the *Brooklyn Music Academy Opera Hall*. In one of his interviews, Bruno Skulte reveals that he was inspired to create the work based on events in Latvia in the 1940s, as well as the fate of the freedom fighters – many of the composers friends and students died in the war. Inspired by A. Eglītis' verses, the composer created an extensively developed **epic oratorical story**, and, due to a very careful following of the text and the imagery of the source, the composer creates an almost opera's scene, sensitively reacting to every detail of the poetry and clothing it in its image created story (for example, the idyllic beginning in the orchestra introduction, the choir of dead souls, etc.)

The poem *God, Your Land is Burning!* itself encouraged the composer to use both sacred and modern elements in this work. The episodes with texts that have religious symbolism have a corresponding sacred music development. As well as psalmody, which comes from the practice of church singing, can be seen already in the first section of the cantata, where the choir psalmodizes the refrain *Dievs, Tava zeme deg!*, constantly reminding one of the horrors in the homeland.

As was already mentioned, *A Prayer for Latvia, Tāivaldis Ķeniņš'* (1919-2008) first composition in the cantata genre was composed for solo soprano and baritone, men's choir, and organ in four movements (*Mother's Prayer, Dies Irae, Our Father* and *Epilogue*). The composer noted that the composition can also be played with symphony orchestra accompaniment, while in one of his interviews he mentioned that to the organ added was a piano, which were treated like percussion, however, the only available written score only includes an organ instrumental part, making it certain that this was meant to be performed mostly in a church.

Reviewing both these examples, as well as looking broader – the further development of **Latvian sacred cantata** genre was by composers who, while **in exile**, earned money as church organists and choir conductors. In the middle of the 1950s, there were more than 10 notable international composers who enriched Latvian sacred music abroad (L. Apkalns, Ā. Ābele, V. Baštiks, J. Kalniņš, T. Ķeniņš, Jānis Mediņš, J. Norvilis, V. Ozoliņš, A. Purvs, and others.) For example, V. Ozoliņš composed approximately 60 sacred choir and solo songs, but V. Baštiks dedicated almost his entire repertoire to religious works, composing more than 300 opuses. **Jānis Kalniņš** (1904-2000), working as an organist and choir conductor in Canada, supplemented his body of work with four sacred cantatas as well as the vocal-instrumental *Symphony of Beatitudes* in English. **Tāivaldis Ķeniņš** was the first to include harsh and contemporary harmonies in his cantata *A Prayer for Latvia*, which surprised both the choir that premiered the work as well as the conductor in Great Britain. Also, **Arvids Purvs** (*1926), while in exile, enriched the sacred cantata genre with five cantatas for varied ensembles – *The Christmas Message, Psalm Cantata, God of Miracles, The Calling of the Bells* and *Facing the Light*. The composition of religious music that began in Latvia was continued by composers such as **Voldemārs Ozoliņš** (the cantata *Winter Celebration*) and **Helmars Pavasars** (the cantata *Admission* for soloists, choir and organ). Additionally, **Jānis Mediņš**, who had not composed sacred music while in Latvia, composed two sacred cantatas while in Sweden – *Holy Communion Liturgy* for soloist, choir and organ and *For Our Lady of Aglona* for soloist, choir and orchestra.

Similarly, **Bruno Skulte**, working the same kind of job, composed the cantata *Prayer* which included fragments of the Litany. The most vivid example of this is the fate of composer's creative work. After beginning to work in church, the composer almost entirely abandoned his previously beloved symphonic music genre to continue with choir music or vocal-instrumental/vocal-symphonic works. **Jānis Norvilis** (1906-1994) was also forced to change his profile from choir conductor and pianist to become a church organist. However, the turn towards sacred music by

practically all exiled composers was not just to *earn a living*, even though that was a factor. The subtext is also sanctuary, support and searches for peace – *the eternal homeland* – while in exile in foreign lands, which was followed by a kind of admission that was expressed by **Jānis Norvilis** in the newspaper *Latvija Amerikā* – “We know that composing sacred music in Latvia is banned, and now, being in exile, this kind of composition is our responsibility.” [2] Is this not a 100% confirmation of *forbidden fruit* and *filling an empty niche*?

Further – I will turn to another significant thematic handover from free Latvia to the Latvian cultural space in exile and back. Though this time it is not in a religious context, rather national independence theme: The fate of **Rainis**’ (1865-1929) poem “**Daugava**” in the twists and turns of Latvian music history. Rainis’ poem is a praise of the Daugava River, which, begins in the territory of Russia and then flows through Latvia. This river has always been significant to the Latvian people, and not just economically. It was always considered strong and powerful. The fight for independence, which does not end in the poem, revolves around this river – in the poem, as well as in real life, this river is considered the *river of fate*. The moaning children go to the Daugava River to find answers and peace in this difficult time, when a new power has entered the homeland, taking away their homes and livelihoods.

In the creation of the poem itself we see notable moments of prophecy. As is known, the Latvian poet Rainis wrote the poem *Daugava* (subtitled *The Orphans’ Song*), while he was in exile in Castagnola (Switzerland). Most of the poem was written in 1916. It is notable that, regardless of the fact that the poem was only first published in 1919, shortly before Bermont’s attack on Riga, but Rainis very precisely described the events that took place on the banks of the Daugava in October and November of 1919. Later, in 1920, when Rainis returned to his homeland, many asked him how was he able to foresee the place and events that took place in Latvia while he was away?

Many composers turned to Rainis’ poem. The symbolism of Latvian folklore used in the text *provoked* composers to use folk motifs also in their music, intonations, quotes, and instrumentation. Fragments of this literary work were used in solo song format by Jānis Zālītis (*Daugava*) and Jānis Ivanovs (*The Land of the Daugava*), as well as in choir songs – for example, Jānis Kalniņš’ *The Banks of the Daugava* for mixed choir and Jānis Norvilis *Our Land (Both Banks of the Daugava)* – the unofficial Latvian patriotic hymn, 1936. One of the first to compose music for Rainis’ poem *Daugava* was Alfrēds Kalniņš, for a performance at the National Theatre. Still, the first Latvian composer who made a serious effort at composing for Rainis’ poem internationally was Bruno Skulte, and, in 1959 in the United States, he composed a major, large scale opus for mixed choir and organ. Twenty-eight years later, in Latvia, composer **Mārtiņš Brauns** wrote music for a performance of Rainis’ poem *Daugava* (1988), from which the song *Sun. Thunder. Daugava.* began its own independent life as a work for mixed choir and keyboards (from 2014 and till nowadays – also the Catalan anthem) as well as a symbol of so-called *singing revolution* in Baltic states between 1987 and 1991. In 1988, with these verses Aldonis Kalniņš composed a song cycle for mixed choir *The Orphans’ Song of Daugava*. The last opus to be developed with this text is Leons Amoliņš’ *Daugava* for mixed choir and symphony orchestra (2001), but, unfortunately, the score has been lost.

As we can see, the poem, symbolizing the fight of the Latvian people for independence, was categorically unwelcome during the Soviet occupation, however, it experienced a significant renaissance in the 1980s and 90s. During the time it was banned, the exiled composer Bruno Skulte composed music for this poem, creating up until now the most comprehensive musicalization of the poem’s verses – **a symphonic poem-mystery** in one act. It is notable that Bruno Skulte, along with librettist Tonija Kalve, added a narrator, which Rainis did not originally have. The presence of the narrator, as well as a developed message, clearly indicate an oratorio genre model. The geography of the composition of music for the poem also confirms the *passing of the baton*, as well as the situation of a *filling of an empty niche*, when the verses are not welcome.

What is happening in **occupied Latvia**?

In the middle of the 20th century (the 1940s – 80s), themes about independency as well as a sacred art has the status of *forbidden fruit*, and writing in this field is not only boycotted, but is also punishable. However, disregarding the taboo, many congregations worked actively and *survived* the entire occupation, actively curating the field of religious music. Over the course of fifty years, **not just sacred music was endangered**, but also Latvian culture as a whole – its folklore, traditions and language. To fight for its *survival*, artists used the help of *Aesop's language*. Aesop's language, or *doublespeak* is the artistically hidden, encoded truth in a work, which only the competent can understand². In this way, alongside works that shouted ideological party slogans, other compositions expressed thoughts of freedom, independence, the nation's identity, and even God.

A vivid example of Aesop's language can be found in R. Jermaks' nocturne *It is Just the Night* (1968), where, in an overall idyllic composition, the Protestant chorale *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* is woven into the part of left hand. In this rumination on the creative work of the Baroque genius J.S. Bach, the Latvian composer follows in his footsteps, truthfully creating an allusion to the grand master's composition, as well as chorale arrangement, thereby touching a forbidden theme of that time – religion, faith, God, as well as thoughts of the eternal, unable to be understood by man, which could only be understood by the competent – faithful, who knew the mentioned chorale. For the rest of the listeners the *nocturne* sounded like a beautiful stylization³.

In the 1960s-70s, a few more differing *doublespeak* tendencies can be observed in Latvian *Soviet music*. Many composers use verses of little known languages at the foundation of their opuses. For example, Marģeris Zariņš' *Partita in a Baroque Style* for mezzo-soprano and instrumental ensemble (1963) uses ancient French verses by Pierre de Ronsard and François Villon. Pauls Dambis' oratorio *Stanza di Michelangelo* (1971) uses Italian, while *Shakespeare in Music* (1976) – ancient English.

An absence of spirituality to a certain degree was compensated by such universal fundamental categories like **homeland, work, peace, art**, etc. These very ethical, humanist values in music, along with the cults of the nation's leaders were, in a strange kind of way, *prayed for*. Everyone who lived under Soviet occupation knew the song *Нам песня строить и жить помогает!* (*A Song Helps Us to Live and to Build!* – L. Utyosov, I. Dunayevski – 30-ies of the 20th century) which, I assume, does not require a detailed explanation and analysis, since it, in the most direct way, reflects both the direction of the ideology of the music, as well as perception in a broader context – forgetting oneself in music and work... In that way, for example, the popular Pēteris Barisons song *A Great Day for Song* (text by A. Skalbe, 1947) – continues to echo among the people and is, in its own way, a symbol of the All Latvia Song Celebration. In Jēkabs Ozoliņš' *Greetings to Soviet Latvia* (text by J. Sudrabkalns) we hear such verses as *The larks of Soviet Latvia loudly sing songs of freedom*. Valters Kaminskis composes the cantata *Song of Life* for mixed choir and wind orchestra (text by Ojārs Vācietis, 1971) etc., etc.

Such a kind of political context had achieved song by two brothers poet Viktors and composer Imants Kalniņš, composed in 70-ies – *Song, what did you get started with?* – and still popular nowadays:

*Song, what did you get started with?
Start with a still word, still word.
Start with a still word, start with a still syllable –
The yours will understand, yours will understand
That the song is a shout/cry!*

² The first to study this question in Latvian music was musicologist Joachim Braun [3].

³ This phenomenon and the composition has been observed in many papers and articles by wife of Romualds Jermaks – musicologist Ilma Grauzdiņa, as well as in my another article [4].

In the verses of song here the fact of singing by itself is transformed yet and has to be understood as a protest against cultural and political dominance of Russians. No matter what is the contest – *yours will understand that the song is a shout/cry!* With the word “cry” you will hear a such a kind of rhetorical figure by the composer as well.

It is paradoxical that the exact same or similar musical perception can also be observed in the compositions of exiled composers. One example is the beginning of exiled composer Jānis Kalniņš' cantata *Elevate Me, Song!* composed in 1979 and premiered in 1981. The patriotic, march-like character is exceptionally similar to the praise of song and work in occupied Latvia at the time of creation of the cantata:

*Elevate, me, Song!
Elevate me over the ages!
Far away over the seas
A lonely voice is born now....*

In that way, someone who only is familiar with music from the occupation might very well consider this a Soviet era work!

The praise of music was used as a kind of sanctuary, *shield*, with which to repel attacks, behind which one can hide and forget, be in one's sonic environment. These kind of content resolutions are offered by both cantatas and choir songs created in the era of Soviet occupation, as well as the exiled Latvian repertoire. It is a jointly found and developed in parallel resolution for the political situation *on both sides of the front*. Many of Bruno Skulte's opuses express such a view. The most vivid example is the cantata with the same name *Song Shield*. The Jānis Veselis poem that is used in this work is about the experiences of exiles – the experience of losing one's homeland and the difficulties that they experienced. Latvia becomes like a dream, something to long for, and everything seems to be in such dark colors, that life itself turns into an *ephemeral illusion*. The thought expressed at the conclusion is that it will be a song that will help the Latvian people. Even though many had to flee their homeland, the song will always be with them, and will link them to other Latvians, and, in that way, Latvia will be praised.

It is notable that these verses in mixed choir songs were also used in works by other exiled composers, such as Valdemārs Ozoliņš (1961) and Eduards Šēnfelds (1963).

In that way, we should note that composers on both sides – both inside and outside of the regime – realized not just the practice of the:

- *forbidden fruit,*
- *Aesop's language,*
- *the filling of empty niches,*
- *the passing of the baton,* but also,
- *appealed to music and song, finding within them strength, endurance, and peace.*

Reviewing the last theme closer, of course, we come to Latvian folklore, which is full of the love of song, turning to song in times of difficulty, in times of sorrow, as well as times of work and rest. Latvians (and I believe, many other nations as well) are a singing nation!

<i>Bēdu manu, lielu bēdu,</i>	<i>My sadness, great sadness</i>
<i>Es par bēdu nebēdāj`.</i>	<i>I did not worry about sadness</i>
<i>Liku bēdu zem akmeņa,</i>	<i>I put my sadness under a rock</i>
<i>Pāri gāju dziedādam`.</i>	<i>Went over it singing</i>
<i>Es negāju noskumusi</i>	<i>I did not go sadly</i>
<i>Nevienā(i) sētiņā.</i>	<i>Into any homestead</i>
<i>Ar dziesmiņu druvā gāju,</i>	<i>I went with my song in the cornfield</i>
<i>Ar valodu sētiņā.</i>	<i>With my language into the homestead</i>
<i>Jo es bēdu bēdājos(i),</i>	<i>If I was sad</i>
<i>Jo nelaime priecājās.</i>	<i>Then unhappiness would be happy</i>

*Labāk gāju dziedādama,
Lai nelaime bēdājās⁴.*

*It is better to go singing
So that unhappiness is sad⁵.*

In the song text catalogue *Latvju dainas*⁶ (*Latvian folk song lyrics*) of the collector of Latvian folk songs Krišjānis Baronis (the Latvian Music Academy is on the street in Riga that bears his name) there is an entire section with the title *Songs and a happy spirit in spite of sadness, misfortune, and difficult days*, which collects more than a hundred of these verses⁷. That is the core for all Latvians, regardless where they live, and cannot be taken away – it is something deeper, almost mentally and genetically encoded. In that way, we can conclude that the regime influences not just the artists that are subservient to it, but also those that are free and have freed themselves. As a result of those events, when artists had to flee their homeland, were forced to change their residence and way of life, this all possibly activated some defined common trends in the entire nation, allowing one to remember deeper, eternal, and ceaseless values of art in the entire cultural space.

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⁴ There are available many of similar versions of this folk song text:

<http://www.dziesmuteksti.lv/print.php?SongID=163> and

https://www.dziesmas.lv/d/Bedu_manu_lielu_bedu_-_Latviesu_tautas_dziesma/16395

⁵ Translation by the author Jūlija Jonāne.

⁶ The open- access of the entire catalogue is available here: <http://www.dainuskapis.lv/>.

⁷ <http://dainuskapis.lv/katalogs/1.1.6.-Dziesmas-un-jautrs-gars-spite-bedam-nelaimei-un-launai-dienai>.